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Civil Service

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T.S. DENISON & COMPANY

CHICAGO

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Convention of Papas, 25 min. ....	7
Country Justice, 15 min. ....	8
Cow that Kicked Chicago, 20 m. ....	3 2

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY, Publishers, 154 W. Randolph St., Chicago

# CIVIL SERVICE

AN AMERICAN DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

A PLAY WITH A PUNCH

BY

WALTER BEN HARE

AUTHOR OF

*"Aron Boggs, Freshman," "A College Town," "The Fascinators,"*  
*"Laughing Water," "Macbeth à la Mode," "Mrs. Tubbs of*  
*Shantytown," "Parlor Matches," "A Poor Married Man,"*  
*"Rose o' My Heart," "A Rustic Romeo," "Savageland,"*  
*"A Southern Cinderella," "Sewing for the*  
*Heathen," Etc., Etc.*



CHICAGO  
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY  
PUBLISHERS

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# CIVIL SERVICE

## CHARACTERS.

OLD R. F. D., A MYSTERY.....(*Character Lead*)  
THE INSPECTOR, B. J. COCHRAN.....(*Heavy*)  
THE POSTMASTER, J. L. REYNOLDS.....(*Old Man*)  
THE YOUNG MONEY ORDER CLERK, STEVE AUDAINE...  
.....(*Lead*)  
THE MAILING CLERK, SIMPSON PEAVY.....(*Character*)  
THE COUNTRY BOY, GOLDIE WEX.....(*Comedian*)  
THE POSTMASTER'S DAUGHTER, OCTAVIA.....(*Ingenué*)  
A LADY OF IMPORTANCE, MRS. T. R. JEFFS....(*Character*)  
A HIRED GIRL, BIRDIE BIVINS.....(*Character Soubrette*)  
A COLLECTOR, MISS GOLDSTEIN.....(*Utility*)  
AND  
THE PLUCKY LITTLE STAMP CLERK, KATE KENYON...  
.....(*Leading Lady*)

NOTE:—*The characters of OCTAVIA and BIRDIE may be played by same actress, as may MISS GOLDSTEIN and MRS. JEFFS, thus reducing the cast to 6 male and 3 female characters.*

ACT I. The Work Room of a Postoffice. The Saturday after Christmas.—The Thief.

ACT II. Same as Act I. A week later.—The Trial.

ACT III. Same as Acts I and II. The next morning.—The New Life.

TIME—*The Present.*

PLACE—*A Small City in the Middle West.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About Two and One-Quarter Hours.*

NOTICE.—Production of this play is free to amateurs, but the sole professional rights are reserved by the author, who may be addressed in care of the Publishers.

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## STORY OF THE PLAY.

A comedy drama of American life depicting the joys and sorrows, the heartaches and struggles and temptations of a small group of government employees working in a post-office in a small city in the middle west. There is the stern inspector, the officious postmaster, the busybody mail clerk, the ambitious young clerk who yields to temptation and robs the postoffice, the kind hearted old man who carries the rural route, the raw recruit and the noble hearted, plucky little stamp clerk, who bravely stifles her own feelings and lives for the advancement of her friends.

Steve Audaine, the hero of the play, has been living beyond his means and is deeply in debt. He steals two fifty dollar bills from a letter, but soon repents his rash action. The postoffice inspector arrives hot on the trail of the thief. Just as Steve's guilt has been established "Old R. F. D.," a kind-hearted old man, the rural free delivery carrier, comes forward and assumes the guilt. Years before he has robbed the mails and was sentenced and served fifteen years in the penitentiary. When he was sent to prison he had a baby boy but when released was unable to find him. He now discovers that Steve is his son and resolves to keep him from following in his father's footsteps. The father-love prompts the self-sacrifice and makes him happy in giving his boy all he has in this world to offer—his liberty. But through the pluck and sagacity of Kate Kenyon, the little stamp clerk, neither Steve nor his father are required to suffer the penalty of Steve's rash action. All ends happily and Steve and Kate and old R. F. D. (with his faithful old mare, Bess) go out on a homestead in Montana to begin a new life free from temptation and care and out of the bonds of Civil Service.

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## SYNOPSIS.

ACT I—The work room of the postoffice. Octavia's birthday. Steve Audaine in debt. Old R. F. D. rides thirteen miles through the snow. "Old Bess ain't what you'd call a reindeer, but she's a good, faithful animile." Goldie Wex, the new substitute from the country. Steve in trouble with the collector. "You can't force me into the hands of the loan-sharks; I'd rather lose my job." A lady of importance, Mrs. T. R. Jeffs. Steve yields to temptation. R. F. D. tells the dramatic story of his life in prison. The little stamp-clerk comes home. "My laddie, my laddie! My dream is over!"

ACT II. A half holiday. The postmaster's daughter announces her engagement. "I have risked my reputation to gratify her slightest desire." The letter for Ira Troutman, Esq. A little homestead in Montana. "There never was a cloud yet too dark to have a silver lining." R. F. D., the comforter. Goldie's lady friend, Miss Birdie Bivins, who works out. The postoffice inspector. Goldie in the toils of the law. "You lie, Steve Audaine, you stole that hundred dollars!" The sacrifice of R. F. D.

ACT III. The next morning. Birdie and Goldie looking for a license. "We don't want a dog license; we want a wedding license." The inspector and the plucky little stamp clerk. Kate is suspected of robbing the mails. Steve finds his father. Kate appeals to Mrs. Jeffs. "Would you send an old soldier to prison for life?" Mrs. Jeffs sees her duty and does it. "The sun is shining on a new life, and we'll all be together, me and my boy and my little princess."

## COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS.

R. F. D.—A simple, kind-hearted, lovable old man of about 67. Gray or white wig, eye-brows and whiskers. Old, soiled boots. Old, patched brown or gray trousers. Tattered coat and vest. Gaudy woollen muffler. Tattered mittens. Old fur cap. Spectacles in pocket.

THE INSPECTOR—A burly, thick-set man with a gruff voice, aged about 40. Neat winter suit, overcoat and hat. Speaks in commanding tone. Always smoking the stump of a cigar. The scene with Kate in Act III must be played with quiet, but intense dramatic force.

THE POSTMASTER—Aged 50. Neat winter suit, overcoat and hat.

PEAVY—A little, prying, gossipy man of about 36. Ordinary winter clothes. Work apron when around office.

STEVE—A good-looking boy of about 20. Well dressed in winter clothes. This part needs careful rehearsing, especially in the strong emotional scenes of Acts II and III.

GOLDIE—Red-headed; freckled, awkward country boy of about 19. Old-fashioned comedy clothes suitable for winter.

OCTAVIA—Aged 19. Somewhat overdressed, furs, etc. Somewhat overbearing. Should be played by a beautiful girl with a distinct style.

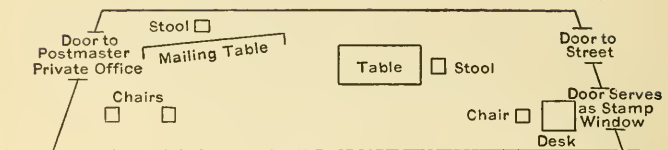
BIRDIE—A country soubrette. Winter clothes of comedy cut. Hair dressed extravagantly. Small muff, etc. Play for low comedy effects. Make up freckled.

MRS. JEFFS—A lady of 45. Loud, commanding voice. She is used to bossing her own house and every other one. Comedy costumes suitable for winter.

KATE—Dark working dress. Black apron and cuffs. Change for Act III to neat winter dress, coat and hat.

MISS GOLDSTEIN—Winter dress, furs, jewelry, hat. Carries collectors bundle of statements.

## SCENE PLOT.



## STAGE DIRECTIONS.

*R.* means right of the stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; *1 E.*, first entrance; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *R. 3 E.*, right entrance up stage, etc.; *R. D.*, right door; *L. D.*, left door, etc.; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.



# CIVIL SERVICE

## ACT I.

SCENE: *The working room of a postoffice in a small town in the Middle West. Time, 7:50 a. m., several days after Christmas. Lights on full throughout the act.*

*Three doors open onto the stage; the one at R. leads to the postmaster's private office; the one at L. 3 E. to public part of the postoffice and leads to the street; the one at L. 1 E. serves as a stamp-window. Half of this latter door (the lower half) is blocked out by scenery, and the upper half is open, but temporarily concealed by a paper shade on a roller. Down L. near the audience is a small desk with a desk-chair back of it. Up R. is a table placed diagonally across the R. upper corner. Behind this table is a stack of cubby-holes for the assortment of mail. A long, heavy, oblong table stands in the C. of the stage, for use in assorting mail. A blackboard appears on rear wall; on it is chalked the train schedule. A large clock hangs at rear. Large calendar and lithographs appear on side walls. High stool in front of table up R., several low stools around the table at C., two plain chairs down R. Waste baskets, mail sacks, a stamping machine, and any other postoffice impedimenta add to the general effect, but are not essential.*

*Bright music takes up the curtain. MR. SIMPSON PEAVY is discovered at rise working at rear of C. table. He is filling a mail sack with letters, papers, parcels, etc., and works energetically, reading addresses, postcards, etc.*

*Enter MISS OCTAVIA REYNOLDS from L. 3 E.*

OCTAVIA (*up L.*). May I come in?

PEAVY (*at C.*). Why, it's Miss Reynolds. (*Bustles down L., dusts office chair and presents it to her at L.*) Good morning. This is quite a surprise. (*Smiles at her.*)

OCTAVIA (*sits L.*). Thank you.

PEAVY. Still snowing outside?

OCTAVIA. No, the snow has stopped, but it's awfully cold. Is my father here, Mr. Peavy?

PEAVY (*at C.*). Yes; he's in his office.

OCTAVIA. He isn't busy, is he?

PEAVY (*smirks*). Not too busy to see you, Miss Reynolds.

OCTAVIA (*rises*). I'll go right in. (*Makes no effort to do so.*) It must be nearly time to open the postoffice, isn't it, Mr. Peavy?

PEAVY (*briskly*). Open her in ten minutes. Eight o'clock sharp.

OCTAVIA. You're all alone, aren't you? (*Pause in confusion.*) I mean, Mr. Audaine hasn't come down yet, has he?

PEAVY. Yes, he's around somewheres. He's a mighty fine young man, Miss Reynolds; a mighty fine young man.

OCTAVIA (*carelessly*). Yes, so I've heard.

PEAVY (*leers at her*). Only heard? Don't you know personally? A little bird has been whispering around that you and Steve are mighty good friends.

OCTAVIA (*distantly*). Mr. Peavy! (*Rises.*)

PEAVY. Oh, I didn't mean anything (*backing toward rear*). It was only my little joke. You know me, Miss Reynolds, I'm bound to have my little joke.

OCTAVIA (*severely*). Please don't joke like that again. I don't like it.

PEAVY. Why, I didn't say anything. I only said—

*Enter STEVE AUDAINE from R.*

OCTAVIA. Yes, I know what you said. (*Sees STEVE.*) Why, Mr. Audaine!

STEVE (*crosses to her and shakes hands at L. C.*). Miss Reynolds.

PEAVY. I guess I'll go outside and see a friend of mine. (*STEVE and OCTAVIA are conversing and pay no attention to him.*) Humph! (*Louder.*) I say, I guess I'll go outside.

STEVE (*turns to him*). Oh, all right; don't let us interfere.

PEAVY. Oh, you ain't interfering at all. I guess I know that two is company and three hain't, and I don't reckon you need a shappyrone. (*Crosses to L.*) That little bird was a wise little bird, wasn't he? Must a been an owl. (*Exit L.*)

OCTAVIA (*at L. C.*). Oh, I can't bear that man.

STEVE (*at C.*). He isn't worth one of your thoughts.

OCTAVIA. He's such a gossip. (*Pouts.*) Why, he inferred that I came down here this morning to see you.

STEVE. I only wish you did.

OCTAVIA. I came to see father. I didn't see him at breakfast, and this is my birthday.

STEVE. I know it. You're a little Christmas snow bird.

OCTAVIA (*smiles*). Oh, Mr. Audaine.

STEVE (*comes nearer to her*). Miss Reynolds, Octavia, I want to give you a little remembrance of the happy occasion. May I?

OCTAVIA. Why, Steve, how very formal you are. Of course you may. You are one of my oldest and closest friends.

STEVE (*takes parcel from pocket*). It isn't much. (*Hands it to her.*) I hope you'll wear it at your birthday party tonight.

OCTAVIA (*opens package, displays leather box, draws out neck chain with dainty La'Vallicre attached*). Oh, Steve, it is beautiful. How can I thank you? And it's for me? It's the dearest of all my presents just because you gave it to me. It's a darling. (*Holds it up.*)

STEVE. I saw it at the jewelry store and thought that it had been made on purpose for you. The little chain with the blue for-get-me-nots, just like your eyes. It seemed that it wouldn't be right for any other girl in town to have it because it just suits you.

OCTAVIA (*putting it in leather box*). You are too kind, Steve. But really, it's a very costly present, and after the beautiful present you gave me at Christmas, do you think I had better accept this?

STEVE. Of course I do. I only wish it were diamonds and pearls.

OCTAVIA (*sighs*). Then I suppose I must; and I do thank you, Steve; you are so good to me. (*At L. C.*)

STEVE. There's only one other thing I'd like to give you.

OCTAVIA. Something else? What is it?

STEVE (*close to her, speaks eagerly*). A ring, a diamond, a solitaire. Would you wear it for me? Would you, Octavia? (*At L. C.*)

OCTAVIA. A solitaire for me? Oh, Steve, what would people say?

STEVE. Just what I would want them to say. Octavia, could you care for me a little? (*Takes her hand.*) When I care for you so much?

*Enter PEAVY from L.*

PEAVY. Oh, excuse me. (*They spring apart.*) I didn't see nothing. I'll go out again, if you want me to.

OCTAVIA (*haughtily*). I don't understand what you mean to infer, Mr. Peavy. Mr. Audaine was just congratulating me on my birthday.

PEAVEY (*laughs insinuatingly*). Oh, that was it, was it? Let me congratulate you, too. Maybe I ought to be congratulating the both of you.

OCTAVIA (*distantly*). Thank you.

REYNOLDS (*outside R.*). Steve, Steve, where in thunder is that last circular of instructions? Peavy, come here. I want you.

PEAVY (*crossing to R.*). Yes, sir; I'm coming, sir. (*Exits R.*)

OCTAVIA. Now, it will be all over town; you know how people talk.

STEVE. Let them talk. Octavia, if you would only give me a little word of encouragement, just a little—

*Enter J. L. REYNOLDS from R. in shirt sleeves.*

REYNOLDS (*at R.*). I never saw such an office. Peavy hasn't got the sense of a tin monkey on a stick. We can't find a thing until Miss Kenyon comes back. (*Sees*

OCTAVIA.) Octavia! Well, well! Many happy birthdays, little girl. (*Kisses her.*) Did you get my little present? I left it at your breakfast plate. (*STEVE works at sorting mail at C. table.*)

OCTAVIA. Oh, papa, it was so good of you. You are a perfect old dear. It's the dearest of all my presents, just because you gave it to me. I'll keep it always. See what a lovely chain I got this morning. (*Holds it up.*)

REYNOLDS. Chain? Who gave it to you? (*At L. C.*)

OCTAVIA (*bashfully*). Mr. Audaine, father.

REYNOLDS (*whistles in surprise*). Steve? Well, well! (*Slight pause. He turns to STEVE.*) Steve, I'm afraid you're spoiling my little girl. (*STEVE comes to R. C.*)

STEVE. Mr. Reynolds, I—

REYNOLDS. Well, take a little tip from father. Don't you take Octavia too seriously. She's a dear, little girl, but she mustn't be taken too seriously.

STEVE. I think I understand you, Mr. Reynolds.

REYNOLDS. Go in and see if you can help Peavy find that last circular of instructions. Honest, he's turned my office upside down. I wish Miss Kenyon was here; she always knows where everything is.

STEVE. She's coming back this morning.

REYNOLDS. Yes, on the ten-ten train. She could put her finger on that circular in a minute.

STEVE. I'll see if I can find it, Mr. Reynolds. (*Exits R.*)

REYNOLDS (*at C., turn to OCTAVIA*). Octavia, I'm afraid you've been encouraging that young man.

OCTAVIA (*innocently*). Oh, no, I haven't. He just likes me, that's all. I haven't had to encourage him at all.

REYNOLDS. Does he know that you are engaged to marry Archie Brocklen?

OCTAVIA. Oh, papa, of course not. That would spoil everything.

REYNOLDS. Steve is a fine young fellow. He's better looking than young Brocklen.

OCTAVIA. He's only a clerk. A mere government clerk. What can you be thinking of? Of course he is good look-

ing and nice; indeed he's quite the nicest boy in town. But Mr. Brocklen is a gentleman.

REYNOLDS. Yes, and he's in Kansas City, and what he don't know won't hurt him. But you'd better tell Steve about him, honey; you'd better let Steve know you're engaged.

OCTAVIA. Nothing of the sort. Why that would be horribly crude. Steve really doesn't care any more for me than I do for him, but in a town of this size one must do something to pass away the time.

REYNOLDS. So you've decided to do Steve.

OCTAVIA. Now, papa! (*Slight pause.*) We're only good friends, that's all. But I hope he won't find out about my engagement until I want him to.

REYNOLDS. Well, don't make him spend too much money. Remember, he only gets a thousand a year.

OCTAVIA. Please let me manage it my own way. What harm is there in an innocent little flirtation?

*Enter STEVE from R.*

STEVE. Here's the paper you were looking for, Mr. Reynolds.

REYNOLDS (*takes it*). Thanks. (*Crosses to R.*) Come into the office, Octavia. (*Exits R.*)

STEVE. Must you go?

OCTAVIA (*at R.*). I'm afraid so. Come over to the party a little early tonight, Steve.

STEVE. You bet I will. I can hardly wait. Octavia, you do care a little for me, don't you?

REYNOLDS (*off stage at R.*). Octavia!

OCTAVIA. Yes, papa. (*At door R.*) Why, of course I do, Steve. Come early. (*Exits R.*)

STEVE (*at Table C., sorts mail and hums "Dearie" or some similar love song*). "Nothing's worth while but thoughts of you, dearie, my dearie."

*Enter PEAVY from R.*

PEAVY (*goes to C. table and works sorting mail*). Well, Steve, how far did you get?

STEVE. I don't know what you mean?

PEAVY. Got the date of the wedding settled yet?

STEVE. Whose wedding?

PEAVY. Oh, you know. Your wedding. I guess the postoffice force will have to be saving up their money to buy you a gilt picture or a piano lamp, or something.

STEVE. I don't know what you're talking about.

PEAVY. Well, a little bird has been a-telling me—

STEVE. Honest, Sim Peavy, you'd better pay more attention to your work and less attention to that little bird.

PEAVY (*angrily*). Don't my work suit you?

STEVE (*pleasantly*). Sure, it does. As long as I don't have to do it.

PEAVY. Well, you ain't the postmaster of this town yet, Mr. Steve Audaine, not by a long shot. And until you are, you'd better not be casting any reflections on my work. You ain't my boss, and don't you forget it.

STEVE. No, I ain't, that's a fact. If I were your boss I'd mighty soon hang out a sign saying "Man Wanted."

PEAVY. You're too smart, young man; too darned smart. You think that just because you've got a kind of a pull with the postmaster's daughter, that you can run the whole Civil Service, but you can't.

STEVE. I think that you'd better not pay any more attention to my private affairs, Mr. Sim Peavy. I don't like it, and I give you fair warning that you'd better not connect my name with any other in your gossip. 'Cause, if you do, you and I are going to come together, Sim Peavy, and come together hard.

PEAVY. Well, then, maybe you'd better pay me that little money you owe me, Mr. Steve Audaine. It's ninety-eight dollars, and it's been running ever since the first of November.

STEVE. I will pay you just as soon as I get my January check.

PEAVY. Your January check won't amount to that much all together.

STEVE. Well, you needn't worry. You'll get your money.

PEAVY. You bet I'll get my money. If I don't, I'll go to the postmaster about it. You're flying too high for a

man of your salary. It takes money to git into society in this town, and if you don't look out you'll lose your job.

STEVE. I'll pay you what I owe this week. And I don't need any of your advice.

PEAVY. Maybe you think you can pay me when you marry Miss Reynolds.

STEVE (*hotly*). If you couple my name with hers again I'll thrash you, Sim Peavy. (*Comes toward him.*) Remember that!

PEAVY. I was only joking. I didn't mean nothing, Steve. It's just my little joking way. Can't you take a joke?

STEVE. Well, don't joke about me. I'm not in the mood for jokes.

PEAVY. My folks at home say that I'm the biggest cut-up in two counties; my wife is always laughing fit to kill at me.

STEVE. Yes, I should think she would.

PEAVY. But I can't afford to let that loan run any longer. I need the money, and I need it right away. If I was to tell the postmaster—(*Clock strikes eight, off stage. STEVE crosses to L., arranges desk, opens window and sells stamps in pantomime. His back is toward PEAVY.*)

*Enter OCTAVIA from R.*

OCTAVIA. Good-bye, Steve. I'll look for you early to-night.

STEVE. I'll be there.

OCTAVIA. And thank you so much for your present. (*Exit L.*)

PEAVY. That's where my money goes, buying her presents.

STEVE. Don't you worry about your money. I'll pay you in a couple of days.

PEAVY. I won't wait; I want it right away.

*Enter REYNOLDS from R.*

REYNOLDS. Has old R. F. D. got here yet?

PEAVY. No, sir; not yet. He's generally here by seven; I hope he ain't snowed up or nothin'.



STEVE. He's just driving in. (*Look off L.*) I can see him in the snow. He looks like Santa Claus.

REYNOLDS. I suppose he's frozen stiff. Thirteen miles through the snow on a morning like this is no snap. Go and help him hitch.

PEAVY. Yes, sir; that's just what I was going to do. (*Exit L.*)

REYNOLDS. Steve, you stay at the stamp window until Miss Kenyon comes. She's due on the ten-ten, but it's fifteen minutes late.

STEVE. Yes, sir. (*Sells stamps in pantomime, weighs parcels, etc.*)

R. F. D. (*heard off stage at L.*). All right, Mr. Peavy, much obliged to you. Whoa, Bess! Stiddy, gal! Now gimme a hist with these packages. All right.

REYNOLDS (*at C., looks toward L.*). Old R. F. D.'s getting pretty old for this winter work. I'll see if I can't fix a job for him here in town.

R. F. D. (*still outside*). Here I come. Lemme get at that fire. I'm froze as stiff as a six-foot icicle.

*Enter R. F. D. from L., packages around his neck on strings, arms and pockets full of parcel post packages. Stamps with cold, exercises arms, etc., to get warm.*

REYNOLDS (*helping him unload*). Got through all right, did you, R. F. D.?

R. F. D. (*at C.*). Did I? You bet I did. It takes more'n four foot of snow to keep me and that old mare, Bess, away from our business. Yes, sir.

REYNOLDS. Pretty cold, wasn't it? Thirteen miles through the snow?

R. F. D. Well, postmaster, it wasn't no dream of a Fourth of July, nor nothin' like that. Si Barkins give me a good cup of coffee, and old Bess and me jogged along until we got here. Whew, it's cold! (*Takes off muffler and mittens, looks at old mittens.*) Got to git me a new pair o' mittens next pay day, shore. These have lasted me nigh onto four years, but they're gittin' down to the last

stages of dilapidation, as you may say. (*Turns to STEVE.*) Mornin', boy.

STEVE (*pleasantly*). Morning, R. F. D. I thought when I saw you driving up that it was old Santa Claus himself coming to the postoffice.

R. F. D. I guess I look like old St. Nick with all them bundles and things. But old Bess ain't what you'd call a reindeer, even in the summer time. She's a good animile, though, old Bess is, but she ain't no Maud S., as you might say, when it comes to speed. Where's the little princess? (*Looks around.*) I thought she was going to come back today. It don't seem natural when she ain't over there at the window sellin' stamps and etceterys.

REYNOLDS. She's coming in on the morning train. You're right, old R. F. D., it don't seem like the same office without Kate Kenyon.

*Enter PEAVY from L.*

PEAVY. It's colder'n a salt mackerel. It's a wonder you wasn't friz, R. F. Didn't you get kind o' cold?

R. F. D. Well, I wasn't wet through with perspiration, as you might say. Long 'bout sun-up it *was* tolerably cold, and I thought once that old Bess was goin' to lay right down in the middle of the road and make a bee line for the happy hunting-ground. But I started to sing. I reckon I must a sung for nigh onto four miles, and old Bess, being a female critter, jest naturally had to keep step to my music. That's how we got here.

REYNOLDS. That trip is getting pretty difficult for a man of your age, R. F.

R. F. D. Man of my age? Humph! I ain't sixty-seven yit. I reckon I'm good for twenty years yet on old Route No. 5.

REYNOLDS. How would you like to have a city run?

R. F. D. Not me. No siree; I wouldn't like it at all. Seems like country folks is nearer to my heart than city folks; they all appear jest like my own flesh and blood. All along the line it's "Hello, old R. F. D., and "Howdy," and, I snum, even the dogs and little children all know

the old man. You see, postmaster, I ain't got no family, no wife ner little children, not even a dog, so it kind o' does my old heart good to know all the people on my route. They're jest like my own kin folks, every one of 'em.

REYNOLDS. But you'd be more comfortable here in the city.

R. F. D. Mebbe so; mebbe so; but here in the city everybody is strangers to everybody else. Might be a thousand people right in gunshot of ye, but nary a one knows who you be, and don't give a cuss. Much obliged, postmaster, fer all your kindness, but I'm goin' to stick close to old Route No. 5 until I have to leave Civil Service.

REYNOLDS. Peavy, have you seen anything of the new man this morning.

PEAVY. No, sir; are we going to have a new sub?

REYNOLDS. Yes. Young chap by the name of Wex. Comes from the country. Send him in as soon as he shows up. (*Exit R.*)

PEAVY (*working at C. table*). Seems like you got an extry large number o' parcel posts this morning, R. F.

R. F. D. Yep. Folks is sending their Christmas presents back to be traded for groceries. Mail is ginerally considerably swelled up 'round Christmas time. Had to laff at the Widder Meaker, though. She was sendin' a mess of carrots over to her son-in-law's on Route 1, and she had 'em in a basket without 'ary wrapper. She stood there talking to me and, I snum, if old Bess didn't come right up and eat two-three carrots right out'n the basket, right under the Widder's nose, as you might say. (*Laughs.*) And she was so skeered that she couldn't even say scat.

GOLDIE WEX *sticks his head in door at L.*

GOLDIE WEX. Say, is this the place?

PEAVY. Shut that door! It's colder'n zero.

GOLDIE *enters and stands sheepishly at door, twisting his hat and grinning.*

GOLDIE. How-de-do, mister.

PEAVY (*at L. C.*). Howdy. What you want?

GOLDIE. Say, this is the pustoffice, ain't it?

PEAVY (*shortly*). And what 'd you think it was, the Presbyterian Church?

GOLDIE. Air you the pustomaster?

PEAVY (*snaps*). No, I ain't.

GOLDIE. I thought you was the boss.

PEAVY. Mr. Reynolds is the postmaster.

GOLDIE. Kin I see him? Paw says fer me to see the boss.

PEAVY. What do you want to see him for?

GOLDIE. Goin' to work here. I'm the new hired hand; I'm goin' to be a ruriel free deliverer.

PEAVY. Oh. Is your name Wex? Mr. Wex?

GOLDIE. No. Paw's Mr. Wex. I'm Goldie.

PEAVY (*laughs derisively*). Goldie? Boys, he says his name is Goldie.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir; that's it; jest plain Goldie. Everybody thinks it's funny at first, but after you hear it for a spell you sorter get used to it. You see folks think it's funny cause my name is Goldie and cause my hair is kinder red. My paw named me Goldie. He got it out of a novel-book he was a-readin', and as I happened to arrive right along at that time, he up and hitched the Goldie onto me.

PEAVY. Wex is a funny name, too. Do folks call you Gold-dust for short?

GOLDIE. Yes, sir; now and agin. What's your name?

PEAVY (*with dignity*). I'm Mr. Peavy. Mr. Simpson Peavy.

GOLDIE (*laughs*). Gee, that's just about as funny as Goldie. Do folks call you Simp for short? (STEVE and R. F. D. *laugh*.)

*Enter REYNOLDS from R.*

REYNOLDS (*at R.*). What's the excitement, boys? Circus parade in town?

PEAVY (*at C.*). It's just about as good as one, Mr. Reynolds. It's the new sub. This is Mr. Goldie Wex.

REYNOLDS (*crosses to GOLDIE at L. C. and shakes hands heartily*). Mr. Wex, I'm glad to know you.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir; I am, too.

REYNOLDS (*smiling*). So you've received your notification, have you?

GOLDIE. My whatification? No, sir; I don't guess I did.

REYNOLDS. I mean a letter from the government telling you that you have been appointed a carrier on Rural Route No. 7.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir, I got a letter all right. It was a awful big letter. Biggest letter I ever see, by heck, and they had it all printed out so as I could be sure to read it. Got it last night. So paw says to me, he says, "Goldie, son" (paw allers calls me son, cause he's my father), he says, "Goldie, son, you're been appinted at the pustoffice." And sure enough, that's what it meant. So I rid in seven miles and here I be.

REYNOLDS. Have the carriers gone out yet?

PEAVY. Yes, sir; at a quarter to eight.

REYNOLDS. You can begin work this afternoon, Mr. Wex.

GOLDIE. My paw said that seein' as how I was over nineteen, it was high time I was gittin' a job in town. "What kin he do?" says Uncle Jake. "God knows," says my paw. "Then git him a job in the pustoffice," says Uncle Jake; so here I be.

REYNOLDS. Peavy, show him where to put his coat, and introduce him to the force. (*Exit R.*)

PEAVY. Bring your hat and things in here. (*Exit L.*)

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. I wonder if I kin take off my store shoes. They're new and are blisterin' my two feet something awful. (*Exit L.*)

R. F. D. (*to STEVE*). What's the matter with ye, boy? Ain't you well? You don't look jest right.

STEVE. Oh, there's nothing the matter with me. I'm all right.

R. F. D. You don't get enough exercise. You orter have a job like mine; one that takes you right into the heart of nature. A trip to the woods, even in winter time, is as good as a tonic.

STEVE. I know it, R. F. I'm afraid I've been burning the candle at both ends for a month or two.

R. F. D. It don't pay, lad; it don't pay. There's only one way to really enjoy life. Be natural, live simply and help your neighbor. That's been my motter fer nigh onto twenty years.

*Enter MISS GOLDSTEIN from L.*

MISS GOLDSTEIN (*coming down C.*). Say, I want to see Mr. Audaine. Mr. Steve Audaine. Is he here?

R. F. D. Yes, there he is. That's Mr. Audaine.

MISS G. (*goes to STEVE, takes package of bills from bag*). You're the man I want to see.

STEVE (*at desk L.*). Good morning. What can I do for you this morning?

MISS G. (*at L. C., speaking loudly and assertively*). I am representing the Goldstein Collecting Agency. I have a little bill against you for sixty-five dollars and fifty cents that is owing to the Simmons Jewelry Company.

STEVE (*worried*). Yes, I know.

MISS G. And another little bill from the Kalem Tailor Company amounting to thirty dollars, and one from the Royal Florists amounting to fifteen dollars. It comes to a hundred and ten dollars and a half, and I'd like to have it settled this morning.

STEVE. Impossible. I can't pay you this morning.

MISS G. All these bills have been running for some time; they've got to be paid.

STEVE. Yes, I know; I intend to pay them. You won't lose a cent.

MISS G. You bet I won't lose a cent. You'll either make a settlement on these bills or you'll lose your job.

STEVE. I'll make a payment on the first of the month.

MISS G. You'll make a payment this morning! If you haven't the money, you must borrow it. Mr. Cohan will lend it to you.

STEVE. Yes, at eighty per cent interest. I don't do business with the loan sharks.

MISS G. Oh, so you think you are above the loan sharks, do you? Well, it makes no difference how you get it. That ain't my business. But you've got to get it. or

I'll go right in that office and speak to your boss. You won't be the first postoffice man that I've had to bawl out. Maybe you know what happened to Arthur Forrest.

STEVE. Yes, I do. He lost his position in the dead of winter, when his wife was sick and they had no food or fire in their little shanty for days. That was your fault. Are you proud of your success?

MISS G. Of course I am. I got my money; that's what I'm after. And believe me, I'm going to get it from you.

STEVE. I tell you I can't pay you at this time.

MISS G. Yes, and that's what you'll tell me next month. Those who dance must pay the fiddler. Come, now; is it peace or war?

STEVE. It's war! Go to the postmaster. Tell him what you will. You can't force me into the hands of the loan sharks. I'd rather lose my job.

R. F. D. (*has taken out old large wallet and takes out two old bills*). Boy, here, take this. Let the old man help you.

STEVE. No; I can't take money from you. She said that those who dance must pay the fiddler. Well, I'm ready to pay.

R. F. D. Here, lady, take this. It's all I've been able to save. It's nigh onto four dollars. But mebbe I can let you have some more the first of the month. Don't be hard on the boy; don't ye, don't ye. Steve's a good boy and he'll pay you jest as soon as he's able. Don't be hard on him. He ain't got no mother.

MISS G. Well, business is business.

R. F. D. Can't you take this here money from me and give him another chance?

MISS G. (*to STEVE*). Do you hear that old man plead for you? Do you see him offering his few dollars to save you from public disgrace?

STEVE. Yes. (*Bows head on desk.*)

MISS G. Do you want me to take that money from him?

STEVE. No; a thousand times, no. Miss Goldstein, won't you give me another chance? Give me a month, a week. Only a week. If you will give me only one week,

I'll promise to have the money in your office by that time. Please give me another chance.

Miss G. *hesitates, then looks at R. F. D.*

R. F. D. Please, lady. Remember, he ain't got no mother.

Miss G. I'll do it. I'll give you a week. (*Goes to R. F. D.*) Say, I want to shake hands with you, old man. You are a gentleman, and it is an honor to take you by the hand. (*Shakes hands with him.*)

R. F. D. Oh, I ain't done nothin'.

Miss G. (*resuming brisk, business manner*). That's all for today. (*Turns to STEVE.*) Remember, you've just got one week.

STEVE. I'll remember and I want to thank you. I—

Miss G. (*interrupting*). Don't waste your time in thanking me. You want to thank that good old man. That's all. (*Goes to door at L.*) Good morning. (*Exit L.*)

STEVE. R. F., how can I ever thank you? How can I ever show my appreciation for what you have done?

R. F. D. (*taking his hand*). I've got a boy somewhere, just about your age, laddie. God grant that some one may be kind to him when he needs it. God send him a friend<sup>t</sup> in need.

STEVE. You have a boy? Why, I never knew that, R. F.

R. F. D. I ain't seen him in sixteen years, lad; not since he was four. I don't know where he is, but I think of him every minute of the day, and dream of him by night. His eyes were just about the color of yours, lad. And he was the cutest little feller you ever see. But I had to go away and leave him. They took me away and I never saw him nor his mother again. But, God is good, laddie. Some day I'll see them. I feel it. I know it. Some day we'll meet again.

*Enter GOLDIE carrying his shoes.*

GOLDIE (*at L.*). Say, is it agin the rules to work in my stocking feet? I got me a new pair of shoes this mornin' at the store. They're about 'leven sizes too little. But



when a feller lives in the city, he's got to dress in style. But they sure do hurt.

STEVE (*returning to stamp window*). You'd better put them on. The boss is liable to come in.

GOLDIE (*puts on shoes*). Gee, but they hurt. I wish't I was back home on the farm. Don't never have to wear no shoes out there, 'cept on Sundays. (R. F. D. *is filling a mail sack at rear*.)

R. F. D. Say, young feller, you'd a better have stayed on the farm.

GOLDIE. That's what I thought myself. But paw was bound and determined to git me a job at the postoffice. And now I've got to wear shoes. Say, is there any pretty girls in this town?

STEVE (*at stamp window*). Oh, yes. The woods are full of 'em.

GOLDIE. Gee, that'll jest suit me. I'm a dabster hand when it comes to the women folks. Folks out my way all say I'm a reg'lar devil with the ladies.

*Enter MRS. JEFFS from L.*

MRS. J. (*coming down L. C.*). I want to see the postmaster.

R. F. D. (*down R.*). Ah, good morning, Mrs. Jeffs. Lovely winter morning.

MRS. J. (*at C.*). I ain't got no time to talk about the weather. I want to see the postmaster, and I want to see him right away.

STEVE (*at L.*). It's against the rules to come in here. You'll have to go around in front to his office.

MRS. J. Young man, do you know who I am?

STEVE (*meeckly*). No, ma'am.

MRS. J. I am Mrs. Jeffs. Mrs. T. R. Jeffs. Boy (*to GOLDIE, who is at L. C., staring at her open-mouthed*), go in and tell the postmaster that Mrs. T. R. Jeffs wants to see him at once.

GOLDIE. Yes, but—

MRS. J. (*loudly*). At once. Do you hear—at once!

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. At once. (*Goes to door at R., stumbles over furniture.*) Yes, sir. At once. (*Exits R.*)

R. F. D. (*handing a chair*). Will you have a seat, Mrs. Jeffs?

(*STEVE sells stamps at window, in pantomime.*)

MRS. J. (*taking chair*). Certainly, I will. Ain't you got an easier one?

R. F. D. No'm; I'm sorry, but we ain't. The government don't furnish rocking-chairs in the postoffice.

MRS. J. (*dusts chair and then sits*). I'll write to the Congressman about it. What do they expect ladies to sit on when they come here on business? It's outrageous. I want you to understand that I'm a citizen. I pay my taxes and I expect to have my rights.

*Enter GOLDIE from R.*

GOLDIE (*at R. C., R. F. D. up back*). The pustomaster says he's busy now, but he'll be out in a few minutes.

MRS. J. (*indignantly*). Can't see me? Can't see me? Did you tell him that Mrs. Jeffs wanted to see him?

GOLDIE. Yes'm, that's what I done told him.

MRS. J. Mrs. T. R. Jeffs?

GOLDIE. Yes'm. Mrs. T. R. Jeffs.

MRS. J. (*grandly*). Well, what did he say to that?

GOLDIE. He says, he says, says he. (*Pause.*) Say, maybe I hadn't better tell you what he *did* say?

MRS. J. (*ominously*). Well, what did he say?

GOLDIE. Well, if you got to know, he says tell that old gabber that he'll be out when he gets good and ready. (*STEVE laughs in pantomime.*)

MRS. J. What! What! Old gabber? Did Jake Reynolds call me an old gabber?

GOLDIE. Yes'm. I think that's what it was. Maybe it was an old gobbler.

MRS. J. (*rises*). Old gobbler! Oh, I'll write to the Congressman; I'll write to the Postmaster General; I'll write to the President. Old gobbler! Oh, I never was so insulted in all my life. (*Walks up and down excitedly.*)

R. F. D. (*coming to her*). There, there, Mrs. Jeffs. I reckon that boy got your name wrong. I'm sure Mr. Reynolds never would call you old at all. Much less a gabber or a gobbler. He must have thought it was someone else. Yes, ma'am, I'm certain sure there was a mistake. I hope you'll overlook this young man, Mrs. Jeffs, ma'm, he's new in Civil Service. And the postmaster—why, the postmaster would never dream of saying such a thing about a prominent lady like you are. No, ma'am, not for a minute. I'll speak to him. (*Exit R.*)

MRS. J. (*somewhat mollified*). Now, there's a man who's got some sense.

GOLDIE. I didn't mean nothin'. Honest, I didn't.

MRS. J. You. You don't know enough to come in out of the rain.

GOLDIE. No'm, I don't. But I allers carry an umberill in wet weather.

*Enter REYNOLDS from R., followed by R. F. D.*

REYNOLDS (*coming to her*). Why, Mrs. Jeffs, dear Mrs. Jeffs, this is indeed a pleasure. I didn't realize who was out here, or I wouldn't have kept you a minute.

MRS. J. That boy said you called me an old gobbler.

REYNOLDS. The idea! Preposterous, perfectly preposterous. Goldie, I'm surprised at you. I'll speak to you later.

GOLDIE. Well, you said to tell that old—

REYNOLDS. That will do. Go in my office and wait for me.

GOLDIE. It's all the fault of these darned store shoes. My feets hurtin' like old Tom Gin. Gee, I wish't I was back on the farm. (*Exit R.*)

REYNOLDS. Now, Mrs. Jeffs, what can I do for you? (*R. F. D. fills sack at rear. STEVE sells stamps.*)

MRS. J. I want to mail this letter.

REYNOLDS. All right. Just drop it in that box.

MRS. J. But I want to be sure it gets where it's going.

REYNOLDS. Oh, that's all right. Just write the address on the envelope.

MRS. J. (*indignantly*). Jake Reynolds, I ain't in my dotage yet. I guess I know enough to address a letter. The idea!

REYNOLDS (*puzzled*). Well, what can I do for you, then? If it's addressed, drop it there, and it will go out by the next train.

MRS. J. But I want a guarantee that it will be safe.

REYNOLDS. Oh, you want your letter registered. Right over there. Mr. Audaine will wait on you.

MRS. J. I was there, and he said it would cost ten cents extra. Now, I ain't goin' to let the government rob me. I put on a two-cent stamp, and that's enough. I got a hundred dollars in that letter. Two fifty dollar bills. (*STEVE listens.*)

REYNOLDS. All right. Mail it just as it is; but you mail it at your own risk.

MRS. J. That's just what I refuse to do. I've heard of money getting lost in the mails and of its being stole in the postoffice. Now, I want you to see to it that my hundred dollars gets to where it's going all right.

REYNOLDS (*sarcastically*). Maybe you'd like for me to carry the letter and deliver it in person.

MRS. J. See here. I don't want no sarcasm. If the President knew how you talked to your customers, I'll bet he'd appoint a new postmaster. I'm going to mail this letter just as you advised me to do, but understand I do it at your own risk. If that money is lost, you've got to make it good for me.

REYNOLDS. Good morning. (*Exits R.*)

MRS. J. Humph! Since Jake Reynolds got appointed postmaster, he thinks he runs the whole government. (*Drops letter in box.*) I'll send it at his risk. (*Cross to door at L.*) Wasn't he the sarcastic thing? Some people seem to think they own the whole earth. (*Exits at L. grandly.*)

STEVE. Yes, and she's one of them. The richest woman in town, and the stingiest.

R. F. D. Well, I'm going to hitch up old Bess and drive over to the station and meet Miss Kate. Say, lad, our little

stamp clerk is a mighty fine gal. They don't make 'em much finer than Miss Kate is. I sure will be glad when she comes back. Seems like the sun shines brighter when she's workin' there at the window. (*Cross to door.*) See you later. (*Exit L.*)

STEVE (*picking up envelope dropped in box by MRS. J.*). Here it is. (*Glances around, then reads address.*) "Mc-Chesney Real Estate Company, Milford." From Mrs. Jeffs. And she said there was one hundred dollars in it. (*Glances around stealthily.*) One hundred dollars. That will save me. (*Tries to open letter.*) I wonder if I can.

*Enter R. F. D. from L. He watches STEVE.*

STEVE. A little steam will open it. I'll do it tonight. (*Pockets letter.*)

R. F. D. Steve, lad!

STEVE (*startled*). What is it? What do you want?

R. F. D. (*goes to table at rear*). Nothing much. Only I forgot the mail sacks.

STEVE. Mail's pretty light today.

R. F. D. Yep. Always is jest after the holidays. (*Gathers up sacks, etc. Puts them on his shoulder.*)

STEVE. Certainly is cold this year. Why, last year the flowers were all in bloom at Christmas time. Just think. Roses in December. It was the mildest winter since '99.

R. F. D. (*pausing up C.*). Yes, I remember the winter of '99. Warmest winter I ever see. Flowers bloomed all through February.

STEVE. Yes, but they say they had a freeze in April.

R. F. D. I don't remember that. I wasn't where I could see the freeze in April. (*Sadly.*) I never saw the flowers bloom again for sixteen years.

STEVE. You must have been up in Alaska.

R. F. D. (*puts sacks down, comes to STEVE, speaks sadly*). No, I was in prison.

STEVE (*starts*). In prison? You?

R. F. D. Yes. Sent up in '99. Postoffice robbery. Got fifteen years.

STEVE. Fifteen years in prison? (*Horried.*) Fifteen years! Why, that's a lifetime.

R. F. D. That's what I thought. It was more than a lifetime; it was an eternity. The stone walls, the stripes, the lock-step and ball and chain, the work in the foundry, and always the dull, hopeless knowledge that tomorrow would be exactly like today. They took my clothes away and gave me stripes; they took my name away and gave me a number. I was no longer a man; I was a criminal, an outcast, a thing to be shunned and pointed at. I was a thief.

STEVE (*starts, involuntarily his hand goes toward coat pocket where he placed the letter*). Fifteen years!

R. F. D. (*fiercely*). I saw my wife torn from my arms, forced in the streets to starve. And my boy, my baby boy, was sick. He was only four years old. I had been having a hard winter. I stole a letter containing twenty dollars. They tore me away from my loved ones, away to that living death. But that was not the worst. Not a word came from my wife; not a letter, not a message. Absolute silence. More than a year later I learned my wife was dead. Had died of a broken heart two months after I was sent up. (*Sobs.*) And I never knew until after a year. Something in me died that night. For the first time in my life I hated humanity. I determined to be revenged upon a society that had so unjustly used me. For three years in that prison I lived with but one thought, endured everything with but one purpose, to get free and then repay my debt. I lived but for revenge.

STEVE. What happened to your little boy? Did he die, too?

R. F. D. No. That was the only thing that saved me. I heard a traveling evangelist preach on our duty to the living. Every one of us, even the lowest outcast, owed a duty to his fellow man, a duty to his own offspring. I thought of my boy—out there in the big world all alone—and I determined to make another trial. I determined to live for my boy.

STEVE. And you found him?

R. F. D. No; I was too late. I've never seen my boy since the day they tore me from his little arms. But I will find him. God is good. I have suffered more than my share. I have sinned, but I have paid the penalty. Some day I'll find my boy. But, oh, lad, for fifteen years I paid the penalty of my one thoughtless crime. I robbed the government mail. I stole twenty dollars. And that act of crime and folly cost me my wife, my only child and fifteen years of my life. (*Slowly*). Fifteen years of my life.

STEVE (*takes letter from pocket*). Fifteen years!

*Enter* REYNOLDS *from R.* STEVE *places letter back in his pocket.*

REYNOLDS. Hello, R. F. Train's just about in. Hurry with the mail.

R. F. D. Yes, sir. (*Grabs mail sacks and runs out L.*)

REYNOLDS. Well, Steve, I guess you'll be glad to see Kate back again.

STEVE. Oh, yes, sir.

REYNOLDS. Say, why don't you try to make a match with our little stamp clerk? She likes you awfully well, and Kate's a girl in a million.

STEVE. Why, er—(*confused*). I'm sure Kate don't care for me in that way at all.

REYNOLDS. Well, take a tip from me, Steve. Don't fly too high. (*Cross to door at R.*) Cause if you fly too high, you're apt to drop pretty far. (*Exit R.*)

STEVE. I wonder if he meant Octavia. No, she loves me and she can win her father's consent.

*Enter* PEAVY *with mail sacks.* *Enter* GOLDIE *from R.* *If there is a stamping machine convenient, let PEAVY run letters through. If not, let him work at sorting up C.*

PEAVY. Miss Kate's got home, Steve.

GOLDIE. Say, what do I have to do now?

PEAVY. Just come here and help me.

GOLDIE. Say, can I take off my shoes? My feet hurt like old Tom Gin.

PEAVY. And Miss Kate coming? I guess not?

GOLDIE. Gee, I wish't I was back on the farm.

*Enter R. F. D. from L.*

R. F. D. (*at C.*). Here she is; here she is Looking as pretty as a red rose in a snow storm. (*Goes to R.*)

*Enter REYNOLDS from R.*

REYNOLDS (*up C.*). Did Miss Kate get in?

R. F. D. You bet she did, postmaster. She's out in front now.

PEAVY (*looking out of door at L.*). It's her; it's her. Howdy, Miss Kate; howdy. Glad to see you home again.

*Enter KATE KENYON from L.*

KATE. Back again, boys. After all, there's no place like home, sweet home.

REYNOLDS (*meeting her at C.*). Have a good time. Miss Kate?

KATE (*shaking his hand*). Did I? I had the time of my young life. I went to three teas, two parties and the Christmas ball. I thought I was back in my high school days. (*Goes to STEVE.*) Laddie, you're looking bad. What's the matter? Indigestion or a new love affair?

STEVE (*lightly*). Yearning for you; that's all. I was simply pining away.

KATE (*goes to R. F. D.*). And how's the parcel post coming? Any more cans of maple syrup explode? Oh, R. F., how happy I am to see you again. You look as natural as life and twice as handsome. (*Puts her coat and hat on rack.*)

R. F. D. We're mighty glad to have you back with us again, Miss Kate. It's just like as if some one pulled up the shade and let in all the sunshine of a June morning. And the birds seem to chirp and twitter and sing because our little princess has got back again.

KATE. You dear! Steve, why couldn't you or Mr. Peavy have thought of that. I tell you all that you can take lessons in chivalry from our dear old R. F. D. (*Puts on black apron and sleeves.*)



PEAVY. I was just goin' to say the same thing, but R. F. took the words right out of my mouth.

REYNOLDS. Miss Kate, this is our new boy, Mr. Goldie Wex.

KATE (*shaking hands*). So glad to meet you, Mr. Wex.

GOLDIE. Yes, ma'am. Much obliged. Merry Christmas.

REYNOLDS. Come into my office, Wex. I need you. (*Exit R.*)

KATE. I hope you will like your work. If you want to know anything, just ask me.

GOLDIE. I want to know how to wear store shoes without making my feet feel like old Tom Gin. You see, I got two corns—

PEAVY. That'll do, my golden sunset. The postmaster wants you.

GOLDIE. Yes, ma'am. Much obliged. Gee, I wish't I was back on the farm. (*Exit R.*)

PEAVY. Mail for 47 all up. (*Takes sack and exits L.*)

KATE (*crosses to STEVE, speaks sympathetically*). Been having a good time, laddie, while I was away?

STEVE. Not much doing. I missed you awfully, Kate. I always miss you when you go away. (*R. F. D. takes sack and quietly exits at L.*)

KATE (*softly*). Do you, laddie?

STEVE. You've been awfully good to me. You're the best friend a young fellow ever had. I wish I could make you understand how much I appreciate all you have done for me. You made me give up my job in the shops and go to a business college at night. You got me my job here in the postoffice. Honest, I—

KATE (*L. C.*). Now, now; you're trying to spoil me with your blarney. Haven't you doubly repaid me? By being honest and faithful and true. Mr. Reynolds thinks you are the best clerk on the force. He told me last month that he could trust you with anything.

STEVE (*winces*). Did he say that?

KATE. Yes. And, oh, laddie, how I have missed you.

There wasn't a man at home who could dance like you can. What have you been doing for the two weeks I was away?

STEVE. Well, not much. I've been kept pretty close here at the office during the holiday rush. (*Comes to her at C.*) Kate, you and I have been good friends for six years now. Ever since that night at the church social when I bought the lunch you raffled off. I took you home that night. Remember?

KATE. Yes. Six years ago. It doesn't seem that long, does it lad?

STEVE. We were just kids then, but we've been pals ever since. I never knew my mother or father. They died when I was a little fellow and I was taken to a children's home. I never had a real friend until I met you. So it only seems natural to me to tell you all my plans for the future.

KATE (*startled*). Your plans for the future?

STEVE. Yes, Kate; I'm in love.

KATE. You? In love?

STEVE. I'm not sure what she thinks about me. We've been awfully good friends, and I'm afraid to tell her how I feel, for fear it may break off our friendship.

KATE. Does she know that you care for her?

STEVE. I think she guesses it.

KATE. Then she is more clever than I am. I never dreamed that you were in love, lad.

STEVE. I get nearly a hundred a month. Lots of fellows get married on that. It won't mean a big house or servants, or a car, but—

KATE. Maybe she won't want a big house or servants or a car. Maybe all she wants is you, laddie; you and your love. A big house is such a nuisance to manage.

STEVE. Honest, do you think so? I could rent a little cottage. A little cottage with a yard and red roses and a porch. Do you think a girl could be content with that?

KATE (*ecstatically*). With roses and a porch? Oh, laddie!

STEVE. Do you think she would listen to me?

KATE (*softly*). It all depends on the girl. You haven't told me who she is yet.

STEVE. She is an angel.

KATE. A postoffice angel?

STEVE. In a way, yes. But she is so far above me. She has so much and I have so little to offer—

KATE (*pauses, as if turned to stone*). So much? She's wealthy, then?

STEVE. Yes. It is Miss Reynolds.

KATE (*low voice*). Miss Reynolds?

STEVE. Octavia. I have loved her from the first moment I ever saw her.

KATE (*slowly clenches her hands, fighting for self-control*). Miss Reynolds? (*Breathes heavily.*)

STEVE. Yes. You understand, don't you?

KATE (*softly*). Yes, laddie, I understand. I understand.

*Enter R. F. D. from L.*

R. F. D. The mail is all up.

STEVE. All right. (*Goes to L. door.*) Kate, be sure and wait for me at noon. (*Exits L.*)

R. F. D. Shall I open the front stamp window for you, little princess?

KATE (*softly*). Yes, please. (*Exit R. F. D. at L. KATE stands at C. like a statue, then suddenly breaks down.*) He loves Miss Reynolds. My laddie, my laddie! (*Sobs.*) My dream is over. (*Totters to desk, sinks in chair and sobs on desk at L.*) My dream is over.

SLOW CURTAIN.

## ACT II.

*Same scene as Act I. Time, a week later, at 11:50 a. m. KATE is discovered selling stamps at window at L. PEAVY and GOLDIE working at table up. C. STEVE working at desk down R.*

*Bright music takes up curtain and stops as soon as characters begin to speak. Lights on full throughout the act.*

GOLDIE. Seems to me that it's about time to eat.

STEVE (*looking at clock*). Ten minutes yet, Goldie.

GOLDIE. Gee, ten minutes more to wait. I'm so hungry that I could eat a crowbar, if it was fried in butter. City folks don't git near as much to eat as country folks do. Wish't I was back on the farm.

PEAVY. Say, young feller, you wanter talk less and work more. Uncle Sam don't pay you to talk.

GOLDIE (*indignantly*). What you want me to do? Per-tend I'm deaf and dumb? Nobody never says nothin' agin my talkin' on the farm.

PEAVY. It's a pity you ain't out there.

*Enter REYNOLDS from R. with open telegram in hand.*

REYNOLDS (*at R. C.*). Say, I just got a telegram from the Postmaster General.

GOLDIE (*down L. C., open-mouthed*). Did he say anything about me?

REYNOLDS (*paying no attention to him*). We're to have a half-holiday this afternoon.

GOLDIE. Hur-ray! What's happened?

REYNOLDS. One of the big politicians is dead.

GOLDIE. Good fer him. I wish't one of them would die every day.

REYNOLDS. Wex, run up the flag at half-mast. We'll close the office at noon. Peavy, I want to see you. (*Exit R.*)

PEAVY. Yes, sir. (*Exit R.*)

STEVE. Goldie, go up and put the flag at half-mast.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. (*Goes to L.*) Ain't nothin' to do but work. (*At door.*) Gee, I wish't I was back on the farm. (*Exit L.*)

STEVE (*crosses to KATE*). This half holiday will do you good. You ought to take a good long sleep.

KATE (*at L.*). Oh, I'm all right, Steve. A good, long sleep wouldn't do me any good.

STEVE. What's the matter with you lately, Kate? You don't seem like your old self.

KATE (*sadly*). No, laddie; my old self is dead.

STEVE. I'm awfully sorry. This has been the happiest week of my life.

KATE. Has Miss Reynolds given you her promise?

STEVE. Well, not exactly. But I feel sure she cares for me. She allows me to take her everywhere.

KATE (*earnestly*). I hope she loves you, laddie. I hope she will make you happy.

STEVE. She's a wonderful girl, Kate. If only I was worthy of her.

KATE. You are. An honest, upright man is worthy of any woman he loves. And you are upright and honest, lad. You're white clear through.

STEVE. Oh, you don't know. Maybe I'm not worth your high opinion.

KATE. You are. Maybe I know you better than you know yourself.

STEVE. But Octavia is far above me. She is rich and accomplished.

KATE. And if she loves you truly, you have nothing to fear.

STEVE. Yes, if she does. Sometimes I think she does, and then at other times I doubt it. I think that if she really cared for anyone else, that life wouldn't be worth living. I know I'm jealous, but it's the toughest thing in life to care for some one when you know they care for some one else.

KATE. Yes, laddie, that's the toughest thing in life.

*Enter OCTAVIA from L.*

OCTAVIA. Oh, I beg your pardon. I hope I'm not intruding.

STEVE (*rises*). Not at all. We were just talking about you. That is, I was.

OCTAVIA (*down R.*). About me? What were you saying?

KATE (*rises*). Mr. Audaine has been telling me his secret. He is like a brother to me, Miss Reynolds. I hope you will be very, very happy.

OCTAVIA. Oh, you mustn't say that.

STEVE (*embarrassed*). No, Kate, you mustn't say that.

OCTAVIA. Why, it's perfectly absurd. We're not engaged, are we, Steve?

STEVE. Not yet.

OCTAVIA. Don't be silly, Steve. You know we never could be engaged. Why, you couldn't keep me in gasoline.

STEVE. No—that is—well—

KATE. Oh, I hope I haven't started anything.

OCTAVIA. And Steve knows that I'm engaged to some one else.

STEVE (*astounded*). Engaged to some one else?

OCTAVIA. Of course. Didn't you know?

STEVE. No, I didn't know.

OCTAVIA. It hasn't been announced yet, but I thought father had told you.

STEVE. It isn't true, is it? Is it, Octavia?

OCTAVIA. Of course it is. It's just as well that you learned the truth at once.

STEVE (*sinks in chair and buries face*). Oh, Octavia!

OCTAVIA. I never dreamed that you really cared. Now, don't make a scene, Steve. I hate scenes. And remember there are just as good fish in the sea. Miss Kenyon, is papa in his office?

KATE. Yes, Miss Reynolds I believe he is.

OCTAVIA (*superciliously*). Thank you so much. (*Goes to door at R.*) Poor old Steve. I thought you knew all the time. (*Exit R.*)

KATE (*crosses to STEVE, puts her hand on his shoulder*). Steady, lad. I'm awfully sorry. I can't tell you how sorry I am.

STEVE (*takes her hand, bows his head over it. Pronounced pause.*) That's all right, Kate. Thank God all women are not like Octavia Reynolds.

KATE. Hush, lad, hush.

STEVE. A flirt, a coquette. And I—I have risked my reputation to gratify her slightest desire. For her sake I have committed crime?

KATE. Steve, Steve! What are you saying?

*Enter GOLDIE from L.*

GOLDIE. I got the old flag up at half-mast, and I hope she stays there till the Fourth of July. Say, ain't you folks goin' to close the office?

KATE (*goes to window, pulls down shade*). Yes, Goldie. The office is closed.

GOLDIE. I'm goin' to take my girl to the movies this afternoon. I might be from the country, but I'm going to show her I'm a sport. I'm going to spend fifteen cents. (*Exit R.*)

KATE. Straighten up your desk, lad. We'll take a long walk. The air will do you good.

STEVE (*rises*). No, Kate. I've got some business to see to. Maybe it's not too late yet for me to become an honest man. (*Takes hat and exits at L.*)

KATE (*at C.*). An honest man? I wonder what he means? I wonder what he means?

*Enter GOLDIE from R. carrying an official letter.*

GOLDIE (*at R.*). Say, Miss Kate.

KATE. What is it, Goldie?

GOLDIE. Here's a letter for Mr. Ira Troutman, Esquire. It's marked general delivery, and it is an official envelope. Who is Mr. Ira Troutman, Esquire.

KATE (*takes letter*). I'll deliver it myself. I know Mr. Troutman.

*Enter R. F. D from R.*

R. F. D. Goldie, the postmaster wants you right away.

GOLDIE. He does? Gee, he's always wantin' me. Nothin' to do round this office but work. As soon as my

girl brings my lunch, I'm going to take her to the movies right away, before they find any more work for me to do. Gee, I wish't I was back on the farm. (*Exit R.*)

KATE. I've got something for you, R. F.

R. F. D. (*at R.*). What you got, little princess?

KATE. A letter for Mr. Ira Troutman, Esq.

R. F. D. A letter for me?

KATE. Here it is. (*Gives him the letter.*)

R. F. D. It's a government letter. Something about my application for a homestead.

KATE. Goldie didn't know who Mr. Ira Troutman was.

R. F. D. Nope. So many folks call me R. F. D. that sometimes I clean forget myself who Ira Troutman is.

KATE. Nobody knows but the postmaster and me.

R. F. D. It ain't necessary. Old R. F. D. is a purty good old name. (*Opens letter, puts on old-fashioned spectacles, reads.*)

KATE (*after a pause*). Is it good news, R. F.?

R. F. D. The best in the world. I've been awarded a homestead way up in Montana. A little farm all to myself. Just me and old Bess.

KATE (*at C.*). Are you going to resign?

R. F. D. Yes, I reckon I be. I kinder hate to leave all of you. You certainly have been good to the old man; but I've always wanted a home, and now's my chance to git one. Then, when I find my boy, I'll have a home all ready for him.

KATE (*softly*). And do you ever think you'll find him, R. F.?

R. F. D. Yes, little princess, I do. The Lord is good. I trust in Him. Some day I'll find my boy.

KATE. What is his name—R. F.?

R. F. D. The same as mine. Ira Troutman, Junior. Named after his paw.

KATE. I hope you'll find him. I do, with all my heart.

R. F. D. Thank you, little princess; thank you. You're the right sort. You're jest the kind of a little girl I'd like to have fer a daughter. Say, when I do find my boy, maybe he'll take a shine to you; and then you two would git



married, and we'll all move out there on my little home-  
stead in Montana. How 'ud you like that?

KATE. I'd love it, R. F. But I'll never marry any-  
one. I'm too busy to think about getting married.

R. F. D. Oh, hush. You'll change your mind when the  
right man comes along.

KATE (*sadly*). No, it's too late now. It's too late.

R. F. D. You don't mean that you've met the right man  
already?

KATE. I don't know. (*Goes to him.*) Oh, R. F., my  
heart is breaking. (*He puts his arm around her as she  
sobs.*)

R. F. D. There, there, honey, don't ye take on so. Don't  
ye. There never was a cloud yet too dark to have a silver  
lining. Remember, the Lord is good. You jest keep on  
trusting and hoping. Leave it all to Him, and everything  
is jest naturally bound to come out all right. Now, git  
on your coat and bunnet, and I'll take you fer a little ride  
with old Bess.

KATE. But—

R. F. D. Now, don't argue with me. The air'll do you  
good, and old Bess is jest pining to lickity-cut out into the  
country. Come on, honey.

*Enter PEAVY from R.*

PEAVY. Hello, R. F., where you going?

KATE. We're going for a little spin out in the country.  
(*Puts on hat.*)

PEAVY. Gee, R. F.'s getting pretty spry for an old  
fellow. You're cuttin' us all out, R. F.

R. F. D. I can't help it, if the girls take a shine to me.  
I might be nigh onto seventy, but I'm still in the ring, I'm  
still in the ring. (*Exit at L. with KATE.*)

PEAVY. No fool like an old fool. Well, we got a half  
holiday today. Guess I'll go home and have a fuss with  
my wife.

*Enter BIRDIE BIVINS from L. She enters bashfully,  
carrying a lunch basket.*

BIRDIE (*at door L.*). Good morning.

PEAVY. Mornin'.

BIRDIE. Can I come in?

PEAVY. Looks like you're in already. What you want?

BIRDIE (*bashfully twists foot*). Him.

PEAVY. What him? The woods is full of him.

BIRDIE. You know. I mean Goldie. The new boy. Mr. Wex. That's him. Mr. Goldie Wex. (*Giggles.*)

PEAVY. Gee whiz, this here mailing room is gittin' to be a regular lover's paradise.

BIRDIE. Is he here?

PEAVY. Yep; he's around somewheres.

BIRDIE (*comes to him, speaks confidentially*). Say, he's an awful cute feller, ain't he? Some girls don't like red-heads, but my maw says that seein' as how I ain't no ten-thousand-dollar beauty myself, that I can't be too particular. I'm kinder crazy about Goldie. (*Giggles.*)

PEAVY. You *must* be crazy to be crazy about him.

BIRDIE. Of course I know he ain't no dude—and he's got freckles, and pigeon-toes, and brick-colored hair, but his heart's in the right place.

PEAVY. What you want him for?

BIRDIE. I brung his lunch. I work over at his aunt's boarding-house.

PEAVY. Well, he'll be here in a minute.

BIRDIE. Say, mister, he ain't got a regular job, is he?

PEAVY. No, he's only a substitute.

BIRDIE. Will he ever git a stiddy job?

PEAVY. I don't know, I'm sure.

BIRDIE. He's a rural free deliverer, ain't he?

PEAVY. Yes.

BIRDIE. Does a rural free deliverer make enough money to git married on?

PEAVY. That all depends. How much would you think necessary?

BIRDIE. Well, I wouldn't marry no man who didn't make at least ten dollars a week. And I'd a heap ruther he'd be makin' twelve. Some folks say that love and kisses is all that's necessary. Well, it may be fer some, but love and kisses ain't very fillin' fer the stomach. I ain't goin'

to marry no man who ain't got a stiddy job and ten dollars a week.

PEAVY. Maybe Goldie don't want to git married.

BIRDIE (*surprised*). Of course he don't. No man never wants to git married, at first. A girl has got to lead 'em up to it. Say, mister, do you know whether he likes roast pork? His aunt said he didn't, but we didn't have no other kind o' meat, so I brung him some anyhow. Now, there's me, I like roast pork, so he might jist as well begin to git used to likin' the things that I like. I ain't goin' to pamper no man.

*Enter GOLDIE from R.*

GOLDIE. Hello, Birdie.

BIRDIE. Hello, Goldie. I brung your lunch.

GOLDIE. Much obliged. (*Looks at PEAVY.*) Mornin', Mr. Peavy.

PEAVY (*working at table*). Mornin'.

BIRDIE (*at L.*). Ain't you glad to see me, Goldie?

GOLDIE (*at R., bashfully twists foot*). Kinder.

BIRDIE. Is that all? And I brung your lunch clean over here in all this snow.

GOLDIE. Darn it, course I'm glad. (*Looks at PEAVY.*) Mornin', Mr. Peavy.

PEAVY. Aw, what's eatin' you?

GOLDIE. Say, don't the postmaster want to see you er something?

PEAVY. Say, are you runnin' this postoffice or not? You ain't no boss of mine. If you want to kiss that girl, go on outside and do it.

BIRDIE (*loudly*). Why, you old—you old—hippopotamus. Goldie Wex, are you goin' to stand there and let that there man insult me afore your very face.

GOLDIE. No, I ain't. (*Throws off his coat.*) Durn you, Sim Peavy, you've got to fight. (*Dances around, sparring, springing back and forward.*)

PEAVY (*alarmed*). Hold on, hold on. I got to see the postmaster. (*Exit R.*)

BIRDIE. Goldie, you're a regular hero. (*Extends both arms.*)

GOLDIE. Birdie, Birdie, come on home and roost. (*Extends arms. BIRDIE runs toward him.*)

*Enter INSPECTOR COCHRAN from L.*

COCHRAN. Here, here!

GOLDIE. Darn it!

COCHRAN. What's going on here?

GOLDIE (*sparring at him as before*). Come on and fight. Come on and fight.

COCHRAN. What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?

GOLDIE. Say, who are you?

COCHRAN. I'm the postoffice inspector.

GOLDIE (*comically*). Good night! Come on, Birdie we'll eat our lunch in front.

BIRDIE. Out in the snow?

GOLDIE. What's the difference. Here's where I lose my job. Come on. (*Start L. with BIRDIE, she protesting.*)

COCHRAN. Where's the postmaster?

GOLDIE. In the office.

*Enter MRS. J. She bumps into GOLDIE, who is about to exit L. with BIRDIE.*

MRS. J. What are you trying to do? Murder me?

GOLDIE. Say, you let me alone. My fightin' blood is up. (*Spars at her.*)

MRS. J. (*hits him with umbrella*). There, take that. I want to see the postmaster.

GOLDIE. Can't be did. He's locking up. And this is a half holiday. (*Exits L. with BIRDIE.*)

MRS. J. I don't care what he's doing. I'm going to see him, and I don't want no back talk. I'm going to have every man in this postoffice arrested from the postmaster down. I've been robbed.

COCHRAN (*quickly*). What's that?

MRS. J. (*at L. C.*). I've been robbed. Robbed right here in this postoffice.

COCHRAN. What do you mean?

MRS. J. I mailed a letter last week and I put two fifty-dollar bills in it. It was to the McChesney Real Estate Company at Milford. Well, they got the letter, but my

hundred dollars had been taken out. Right here in this postoffice. I'm going to write to the Congressman. I'm going to write to the President. I'm going to have the whole office force arrested. (*In front of chair at L.*)

COCHRAN. Sit down.

MRS. J. Sit down? Say, do you know who you are talking to?

COCHRAN (*loudly*). Sit down.

MRS. J. (*sits*). I'm down.

COCHRAN. Now, what's your name?

MRS. J. Mrs. T. R. Jeffs. My husband is connected with the National Bank, he's a member of the City Council and the Chief Imperial Potentate of the Woodenmen of the World.

COCHRAN. You say you mailed a letter last week containing a hundred dollars?

MRS. J. Yes. Two fifty-dollar bills.

COCHRAN. Was it registered?

MRS. J. No, sir.

COCHRAN. Why not?

MRS. J. I wasn't going to pay the ten cents extra to register it. I didn't think it was necessary, and that's just what I told Jake Reynolds. I says to him, says I—

COCHRAN. What day did you mail the letter?

MRS. J. I think it was a Saturday. Or maybe on a Monday or Tuesday. (*Thinks.*) Still it might 'a been on Wednesday, or the Thursday or Friday before. I never was no hand fer remembering dates.

COCHRAN (*making notes in small book*). Was it mailed before Christmas?

MRS. J. No, sir; afterwards. Two days after Christmas.

COCHRAN (*making note*). On Saturday, then.

MRS. J. Yes, sir.

COCHRAN. Did you mail the letter on the street?

MRS. J. No, sir. I mailed it right here in this room. I put it there in that box myself.

COCHRAN. Then none of the city carriers had anything to do with it. Ah, ha! That narrows the case. How did you happen to mail it here?

MRS. J. Because I was afraid I might lose the hundred dollars. (*Half cries.*) And now I've lost it. And Theodore will blame it all on me. (*Cries.*) I brought it to the postmaster, and wanted him to take charge of it. But he insulted me. He c-called m-me an old, an old g-g-gobbler.

COCHRAN. Who saw you mail the letter?

MRS. J. The young fellow who sells the special deliveries.

COCHRAN. Mr. Audaine?

MRS. J. Yes, that's him. But I'm sure he ain't the one. He's too good looking. I know he wouldn't take a cent.

COCHRAN. Who else knew about the hundred dollars?

MRS. J. The postmaster, and that red-headed imp who tried to assault and batter me just now. And he said I was an old gobbler, too. I never see such an insulting postoffice. I ain't casting no suspicions, Mr. Inspector, but I feel certain sure that he's the one who took my money.

COCHRAN. You mean Mr. Wex?

MRS. J. I don't know whether he's a Wex or not, but I'll bet a doughnut he's a skallywag. I never did like red-headed men no how.

COCHRAN. Was there anyone else around when you mailed the letter?

MRS. J. I ain't sure.

COCHRAN. Was Miss Kenyon here?

MRS. J. I don't remember. Maybe she was, but I wouldn't swear to it.

COCHRAN. Was Mr. Peavy here?

MRS. J. No, he wasn't. He was shooting craps in the grocery store. I saw him on my way home.

COCHRAN. Do you know Mr. Audaine very well?

MRS. J. Not so very well. But I know he didn't take my money. Why, he moves with the best society in town. Folks say he's going to marry the postmaster's daughter. He gives her the loveliest presents. Their hired girl told my daughter Toosy that he give her a di'mond necklace for a birthday present.

COCHRAN (*with closed lips, signifying suspicion*). Um-um!

MRS. J. But that red-headed imp is a new man here in

town. I got my suspicions about him. On Monday morning he put eighty dollars in the bank.

COCHRAN. How do you know that?

MRS. J. My husband said so. He works in the bank.

COCHRAN (*making notes*). So Wex deposited eighty dollars on Monday, did he?

MRS. J. Yes, he did. And where did he git it? That's what I want to know. Where did he git? (*Rises.*)

COCHRAN. That's just what I am going to find out. That will be all, Mrs. Jeffs.

MRS. J. Can you send me my hundred dollars this afternoon?

COCHRAN. I'm afraid not. But I'll do the best I can.

MRS. J. You'd better. Or I'll have every man in the hull postoffice arrested, from the postmaster down.

COCHRAN. I'll probably send for you later. Now, go home and don't worry. And above all, don't tell a soul about this matter.

MRS. J. All right. I'll do as you say. (*Goes to door at L.*) But I ain't goin' to lose a cent of that money. Even if I have to write to the President. I ain't a goin' to lose a cent. (*Exit L.*)

*Enter REYNOLDS from R.*

REYNOLDS. Why, hello, Cochran. Glad to see you. (*Shakes hands.*) No work this afternoon. Just got orders to close the office for half a day.

COCHRAN. Yes, I heard about it.

REYNOLDS. Come and join me for lunch. We'll go out to the Country Club.

COCHRAN. I don't think we'll have time for lunch, Reynolds. I guess you and I'll be pretty busy this afternoon.

REYNOLDS (*astounded*). Busy? What d' y' mean?

COCHRAN (*seriously*). I mean that you have a thief here in your office.

REYNOLDS (*astounded*). A thief in my office?

COCHRAN. Yes. Pretty bad case. A hundred dollars has been taken from a letter. It looks pretty bad.

REYNOLDS (*gives a low whistle of surprise*).

COCHRAN. Mrs. T. R. Jeffs has filed a complaint.

REYNOLDS. I know her. I remember her mailing a letter containing that amount.

COCHRAN. Well, someone here in the office has taken it.

REYNOLDS. But who?

COCHRAN. That's what we are going to find out this afternoon.

REYNOLDS (*thinking*). She mailed the letter last Saturday. Mailed it in here.

COCHRAN. That lets all the carriers out.

REYNOLDS. Yes, it does.

COCHRAN. Who saw her mail it? Who saw the money?

REYNOLDS. I'm not sure, but I think the new substitute, Goldie Wex, was here, and Steve Audaine. I don't remember whether Miss Kenyon was here or not. That was the day she got back home.

COCHRAN. Who is this new substitute, Wex?

REYNOLDS. A green country boy, right off the farm.

COCHRAN. Um-um. Maybe he ain't as green as he looks. How about Steve Audaine?

REYNOLDS. As honest as the day is long. Steve wouldn't touch a cent.

COCHRAN. Sure.

REYNOLDS. Perfectly.

COCHRAN. How long has he worked here?

REYNOLDS. About four years.

COCHRAN. Where'd he come from?

REYNOLDS. He worked in the railroad shops before he entered the service. Miss Kenyon took an interest in him. He went to night school, and she helped him pass his examination.

COCHRAN. Did this letter pass through his hands?

REYNOLDS. I don't know.

COCHRAN. Has he got any bad habits?

REYNOLDS. I don't think so. He's one of the most popular boys in town.

COCHRAN. Does he live within his means?

REYNOLDS (*hesitates*). Well—er—



COCHRAN (*bullying*). Come on. Come clean. Does he, or don't he?

REYNOLDS. I don't know.

COCHRAN. He's a pretty good spender, ain't he?

REYNOLDS. I believe he has that reputation.

COCHRAN. I understand he is very attentive to your daughter.

REYNOLDS. Oh, they're good friends, that's all. Octavia is engaged to a young man in the city.

COCHRAN. And now, how about this new boy Wex? How long has he been here?

REYNOLDS. He came to work last Saturday.

COCHRAN. Ah, ha! (*Makes note.*) On the very day the money was taken.

REYNOLDS. That's right.

COCHRAN. Has he any money?

REYNOLDS. Not much.

COCHRAN. He isn't paid in advance, is he?

REYNOLDS. No, sir.

COCHRAN. Are his people wealthy?

REYNOLDS. I think not.

COCHRAN. And yet he placed eighty dollars in the bank on Monday.

REYNOLDS. He did?

COCHRAN. I guess he's our man, Reynolds.

REYNOLDS. It doesn't seem possible, and yet—

COCHRAN (*impatently*). Well, someone took that money. You don't suspect Miss Kenyon, do you?

REYNOLDS. Good Heavens, no! I'd as soon suspect my own daughter.

COCHRAN. Any of your men bothered with collectors?

REYNOLDS. I don't know.

COCHRAN. Ever have any collectors call here?

REYNOLDS. Yes. A Miss Goldstein was here last Saturday.

COCHRAN. Um-um! Who was she looking for?

REYNOLDS. I don't know. I saw her as she went out.

COCHRAN. I wonder if she was after this young Wex.

REYNOLDS. I don't know.

COCHRAN. Where is her office?

REYNOLDS. Just across the square.

COCHRAN. Get your hat. We'll go over and see her.

REYNOLDS. All right. (*Gets hat and overcoat.*) This is a bad business.

COCHRAN. We'll get him all right. I think I could put my hand on the thief this minute.

*Enter GOLDIE and BIRDIE from L.*

GOLDIE (*to postmaster*). Say, boss, me and my girl's goin' to the moving-picture show this afternoon. You don't need me no more, do you?

COCHRAN. Yes, we do.

GOLDIE. Oh, darn. Say, this is a half holiday.

COCHRAN. I guess we won't take a holiday today.

GOLDIE. I ain't goin' to work on no holidays. I'm goin' to the picture show.

COCHRAN. Oh, no, you ain't.

GOLDIE. Say, you ain't my boss.

REYNOLDS. Wex, this is the Inspector.

GOLDIE. I don't give a hang if he is. I'm going to resign. I don't like this job no how. I'm going back on the farm—me and Birdie.

COCHRAN. You stay here till we come back. Understand? (*Loud.*) You stay here. You're to do as I say. Understand?

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. Darn it. I wish't I was back on the farm.

COCHRAN. Come on, Reynolds. (*Exit L. followed by REYNOLDS.*)

GOLDIE. Gee, that man sure is bossy. I wish't I was back on the farm.

BIRDIE. Ain't we goin' to git to go to the movies at all?

GOLDIE. How do I know? More'n likely that old inspector'll make me scrub out the whole darned postoffice. I don't see what he has to come buttin' in fer. Sit down, Birdie, and rest your feet.

BIRDIE (*sits at R.*). Ain't no fun sittin' down here. And they've got a perfectly splendiferous show on this

afternoon at the movies. "Blue-Blooded Mike, the Terror of Dead Man's Gulch." Gee, this is tough luck.

*Enter KATE and R. F. D. from L.*

KATE. That certainly was a fine ride. (*Removes hat and coat.*)

R. F. D. Say, you ain't going to work this afternoon, are you, little princess?

KATE. Not much. Just a few accounts to balance. Then we'll take another ride.

R. F. D. I'll go down and look at the furnace. (*Exits R.*)

KATE. What are you doing here, Goldie.

GOLDIE. Inspector ordered me to wait here till he comes back.

KATE (*alarmed*). The inspector? Is he here?

GOLDIE. Yep. Darn him. We have to work, even on a half holiday. Gee, I wish't I was back on the farm.

KATE. I wonder what the inspector is doing here?

GOLDIE. Jest buttin' in, that's what he is doing. Won't give me and my girl a chance to go to the movies.

*Enter STEVE AUDAINE from L.*

KATE. Feel better, Steve?

STEVE (*hanging up coat and hat*). Yes, Kate. Everything is all right. I feel better now than I have been for months.

KATE. I'm so glad. (*Works at books at L.*)

GOLDIE. Hello, Steve. Let me make you acquainted with my lady friend, Miss Birdie Bivins.

STEVE (*at C.*). Pleased to meet you, Miss Bivins.

BIRDIE (*giggles*). Much obliged. (*To GOLDIE.*) Ain't he the sweetest thing.

GOLDIE (*swells up chest, struts across R.*). Oh, I don't know. There are others; there are others!

*Enter COCHRAN and REYNOLDS from L.*

KATE. Good afternoon, Mr. Cochran.

COCHRAN. Afternoon, Miss Kenyon. How do you do, Steve?

STEVE. How do you do, Inspector.

COCHRAN. I'm going to use this room for a little while. Kate, you and Steve can work in the postmaster's private-office.

KATE (*rises, gathers up work*). Yes, sir. (*Exit R.*)

COCHRAN. I'll want you presently, Steve.

STEVE (*frightened*). Yes, sir. I'll be in there. (*Exits R.*)

GOLDIE. Come on, Birdie. Now I guess we can go to the movies.

COCHRAN. I guess you can't. Young man, you wait right here.

BIRDIE. And what'll I be doing?

COCHRAN. You can wait, too.

GOLDIE. No, sir. I ain't goin' to wait no longer. I'm going out for a holiday.

COCHRAN. If you go out, you'll go with a policeman. You are under arrest.

GOLDIE. Arrest?

COCHRAN. That's what I said.

GOLDIE. Aw, you're kiddin' me. You ain't no policeman.

BIRDIE. Oh, Goldie, what have you been and gone and done?

GOLDIE. I ain't done nothin'.

COCHRAN. Go in there and wait, young woman. I'll call you when I want you.

BIRDIE. What must I do, Goldie?

GOLDIE. Go on in and wait. An don't let 'em skeer you. I ain't skeerd.

BIRDIE. Oh, Goldie, are you arrested fer sure enough?

GOLDIE. Naw, there ain't nothin' to it. Go on and wait.

BIRDIE. All right, Goldie. (*Exits R.*)

COCHRAN (*seated at L. smoking cigar*). Come here, young man.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. (*Crosses to L. and sits.*)

COCHRAN (*savagely*). Stand up.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. (*Stands.*)

REYNOLDS *sits at rear.*

COCHRAN. Now, what did you do with the money?

GOLDIE. What money?

COCHRAN (*loudly*). The money you stole. The two fifty-dollar bills you took from that letter.

GOLDIE. I never took no two fifty-dollar bills from no letter.

COCHRAN. Don't lie to me. We've got the goods on you. Understand? We've got you just where we want you.

GOLDIE. I ain't no thief. I never took no money.

COCHRAN (*saragely*). Don't lie to me. I want you to tell the truth. And you're going to tell it. Understand? You're going to confess the whole thing before you get out of this room.

GOLDIE. I ain't got nothin' to confess.

COCHRAN. You saw Mrs. Jeffs put that money in the letter, didn't you?

GOLDIE. No, sir; I didn't.

COCHRAN. You saw her mail the letter. We know you did. And we know you took that letter and took out those bills. I ain't got all day to fool with this case. The best thing you can do is to come clean. Understand?

GOLDIE. I never took no money.

COCHRAN (*asks questions rapidly*). What's your name?

GOLDIE. Goldie Wex.

COCHRAN. How long you worked here?

GOLDIE. Since last Saturday.

COCHRAN. What day was the money stolen?

GOLDIE. I don't know.

COCHRAN. Yes, you do. It was stolen on Saturday. Understand? That money was stolen on the very day you came here to work.

GOLDIE. I can't help that. I never stole no money.

COCHRAN. Did you ever steal anything else?

GOLDIE. No, sir. Nothin' but apples and things like that.

COCHRAN (*to REYNOLDS*). You hear him. He admits being a thief. He says he is a thief.

GOLDIE. I don't neither. I only stole some apples out

in the country. Every boy does that. That hain't bein' no thief.

COCHRAN. If you stole apples you would steal money. Now, you did steal those bills from that letter, didn't you?

GOLDIE. No, sir, I did not.

COCHRAN. Ever been arrested before?

GOLDIE. No, sir.

COCHRAN. Have you had any money since you've worked here?

GOLDIE. No, sir.

COCHRAN. You lie. You deposited eighty dollars in the bank on Monday morning. Didn't you?

GOLDIE (*confused*). Yes, sir. You see, it was this way—

COCHRAN. That'll do. I've caught you in a lie. You are a liar as well as a thief. You stole a hundred dollars and put eighty in the bank. What did you do with the rest of the money?

GOLDIE. I never stole nothin'. My paw give me that eighty dollars.

COCHRAN. Don't try to lie any more. It won't do you no good. The best thing for you to do is to make a full confession. That'll save us all a lot of trouble. Understand? We've got the goods on you, but we want a confession.

GOLDIE. I ain't goin' to make no confession. I never stole nothin'.

COCHRAN. We know you put eighty dollars in the bank on Monday morning.

GOLDIE. I did. My paw sold a brown heifer and a couple of old sows and give me the money. That's where the eighty dollars come from.

COCHRAN. Why did you wait till Monday morning to put it in the bank?

GOLDIE. I don't know.

COCHRAN. I know. Because you didn't have it till Saturday. You didn't get a chance to steal from the postoffice until Saturday. Now, for the last time, are you goin' to make a confession? Come on, now. Are you? For the

last time? If you don't, it's the county jail for yours. The marshal is waiting outside. Come on now. For the last time. I'm givin' you your last chance?

GOLDIE. I won't confess to nothin' I didn't do. I never stole no money. Honest, I never stole nothin'.

COCHRAN. That'll do. Stand over there. (*Points to rear C.*)

GOLDIE. Are you going to put me in jail?

COCHRAN. Shut up. I gave you your chance—and you didn't take it. It's all up with you. Reynolds, call in the others. (*Exit REYNOLDS at R.*)

GOLDIE (*cries*). Oh, gee, I wish't I was back on the farm.

*Enter REYNOLDS from R. with KATE, STEVE, BIRDIE, PEAVY and R. F. D. KATE and STEVE come down R. R. F. D. and BIRDIE go to GOLDIE. PEAVY and REYNOLDS up L. COCHRAN still seated down L., smoking stump of cigar.*

COCHRAN. Peavy, come here.

PEAVY. Yes, sir. (*Goes to C. quickly.*)

COCHRAN. Do you know this man, Wex?

PEAVY. Yes, sir.

COCHRAN. Know anything about his habits?

PEAVY. Well, he's kinder quarrelsome. Always trying to pick a scrap.

COCHRAN. Does he spend much money?

PEAVY. I don't know.

COCHRAN. Ever try to borrow any money from you?

PEAVY. No, sir.

COCHRAN. Did anyone on the force ever try to borrow any money from you?

PEAVY. Yes, sir.

COCHRAN. Who was it?

PEAVY. Mr. Audaine.

COCHRAN. Hum-hum! Did you lend it to him.

PEAVY. Yes, sir.

COCHRAN. How much?

PEAVY. Ninety-eight dollars. It's been running since the first of November.

COCHRAN. Has he paid anything yet?

PEAVY. Yes, sir. He paid me twenty dollars last Saturday afternoon.

COCHRAN (*calmly*). That'll do. (PEAVY joins REYNOLDS.) Miss Kenyon.

KATE. Yes, sir. (*Comes to C.*)

COCHRAN. Anyone on the force ever borrow anything from you?

KATE (*faintly*). No, sir.

COCHRAN. I might as well tell you all that there has been a robbery committed in this postoffice. On last Saturday morning two fifty dollar bills were taken from a letter. Do you know anything about it?

KATE (*worried*). No, sir. I don't think I do.

COCHRAN (*saragely*). What d'ye mean, don't *think* you do? Do you or don't you?

KATE. No, sir; I don't.

COCHRAN. Have you any idea who took that money?

KATE (*staggers slightly*).

COCHRAN. What's the matter with you?

KATE. I feel faint. May I have some water? (*Exit R. F. D. at R.*)

COCHRAN. What do you want with water? Come on, now, I want the truth. Understand? Do you suspect anyone?

KATE. I—oh, Mr. Cochran—I—(*staggers*).

*Enter R. F. D. bearing glass of water.*

(*Note: This glass must be thin, to shatter easily. R. F. D. goes to KATE and gives her a drink. He then returns to C. at rear, standing with the glass in his hand.*)

COCHRAN. I don't want to be hard on you, Miss Kenyon. No one suspects you. I guess we know where the thief is all right, all right. That'll do, Miss Kenyon. (KATE goes to R.) Mr. Audaine!

STEVE (*comes to C.*). Yes, sir.

COCHRAN. Know anything about this case?



STEVE. No, sir.

COCHRAN (*loudly*). *You lie, Steve Audaine! You stole that hundred dollars!*

STEVE. I—I—I—

COCHRAN. You saw Mrs. Jeffs put that letter in that box. You heard her say she put a hundred dollars in it. You've been squandering your money for the past two months. You were in debt up to your neck. You stole that letter. You opened it. You stole that hundred dollars!

STEVE. I did not.

COCHRAN. You did! Where did you get the money to pay Peavy that twenty dollars? Where did you get the money to make a payment to Miss Goldstein? We've got you. Understand? We've got you!

STEVE. It's all a mistake. I never took the money.

KATE. No, no. Steve. (*Sinks in chair at R.*)

STEVE (*goes to her*). Kate, Kate, you don't believe this, do you?

COCHRAN (*at L.*). Young man, I'm sorry for you. You've had a hard life. Now the thing for you to do is to come clean and confess. Let me see. You came from the orphan asylum, didn't you?

STEVE (*low voice*). Yes, sir.

COCHRAN. Know who your father or mother are?

STEVE (*at R.*). No, sir.

COCHRAN. Don't even know your real name, do you?

STEVE. Yes, sir. My real name is Ira Troutman. (*R. F. D. at C. rear drops glass to floor, where it shatters. All look at him. He trembles. Collects himself. Comes down C. and looks appealingly at COCHRAN.*)

R. F. D. Don't go no further, Inspector. That boy never stole the money. I'm the man you want. I'm the thief. I stole that hundred dollars.

ALL. You?

R. F. D. Yes, my record's agin me. I spent fifteen years in prison for stealing from a postoffice. The temptation was too strong. Take me away, Inspector. Take me away.

TABLEAU AND SLOW CURTAIN.

## ACT III.

*Same scene as Acts I and II. Time, six o'clock the next morning. Slow, sad music at the rise of the curtain. COCHRAN discovered seated at L. smoking a cigar stump. After curtain is well up there is a slight pause, then the clock strikes six.*

COCHRAN (*starts, looks at the clock, looks at his watch*). Six o'clock. Time for breakfast. The old man hasn't slept a wink all night. Poor devil. This'll mean five years for him and he'll never live to get his liberty. What fools some men are—and all for a paltry hundred dollars. (*Knock heard at door L.*) Come in.

*Enter GOLDIE and BIRDIE from L. They come down C., BIRDIE carrying a lunch basket.*

BIRDIE. Good morning, mister.

COCHRAN (*shortly*). Mornin'.

GOLDIE. We've brought some breakfast over for Mr. R. F.

COCHRAN. All right.

GOLDIE. Can we see him?

COCHRAN. What you want to see him for?

BIRDIE. To tell him how sorry we are for him. Poor old man. Just think, Goldie, it might 'a been you.

GOLDIE. Yes, it might. Durn you, Inspector, if it hadn't a been fer my lady friend here, I'd a come over this mornin' and told you what I thought of you. You knowed all the time I never took that money.

COCHRAN. Well, this ought to be a lesson to you, young man.

GOLDIE. It was. I'm resigned right now. I'm goin' to git married. Me and Birdie.

BIRDIE. Now, Goldie, hush. This yere man don't want to hear none of our private matrimonial affairs.

GOLDIE. And we're goin' back to live on the farm.

COCHRAN. That's the best thing you can do. I'm afraid you never was cut out for a city man, Wex.

GOLDIE. Oh, I guess I could be if I wanted to.

BIRDIE. Of course you could. You could be anything you wanted to be, Goldie. I think you are simply perfect.

GOLDIE. Is Mr. R. F. got up yet?

COCHRAN. Yes, he's in there. You can go right in.

GOLDIE. Much obliged. Come on, Birdie. (*Exit R.*)

BIRDIE. Yes, darling. I'm a comin'. (*Exit R.*)

COCHRAN. He's going to marry the girl he loves. He don't know how lucky he is.

*Enter REYNOLDS from R.*

REYNOLDS. Morning, Cochran.

COCHRAN. You're up pretty early for Sunday morning.

REYNOLDS. What kind of a night did R. F. pass?

COCHRAN. He didn't sleep a wink. The marshal said he just sat still the whole night through. It's pretty tough on the old man, Reynolds. Five years. Too bad; too bad.

REYNOLDS. He is nearly seventy years old and he is an old soldier. If he is sent up for five years, he'll die before next Christmas. And I don't believe he stole that money.

COCHRAN. What's that?

REYNOLDS. I think he's crazy. Or maybe he's trying to shield some one else.

COCHRAN. Nonsense. Men don't go to prison for five years to shield some one else. That only happens in novels.

REYNOLDS. What is he doing now?

COCHRAN. Wex is in there with some breakfast for him.

REYNOLDS. I won't go in, then. I'll come over later.

*Enter KATE from L.*

KATE. Mr. Reynolds, I've been looking for you. I went to your house and they told me you'd come over here.

COCHRAN. Morning, Miss Kenyon.

KATE. Good morning.

COCHRAN. I'll just step in the next room. (*Exit R.*)

REYNOLDS. What do you want, Kate?

KATE. I have one hundred and fifty dollars in the bank. See, here is my book showing that much to my credit. But

this is Sunday and I can't draw it out. I want you to cash a check for me for one hundred and fifty dollars.

REYNOLDS. Why, I haven't that much here. If you'll come up to the house I can get it for you.

KATE. Thank you.

REYNOLDS. But why do you want it today? Why not wait until tomorrow?

KATE. Please don't ask any questions, Mr. Reynolds. Please.

REYNOLDS. All right. If there's anyone in the world that is worthy of trust, Kate Kenyon, you are that person. Come on. (*Exit L.*)

KATE. Thank you. (*Follows him off L.*)

*Enter COCHRAN from R. followed by GOLDIE and BIRDIE.*

COCHRAN (*coming down L.*). I think I'll go out to breakfast.

BIRDIE (*down R.*). Poor old man; wouldn't eat a bite. It's too bad, and I brung him some roast pork sandwiches, and dried apple pie, and a hull pickled pig's foot. And he couldn't eat a bite.

GOLDIE (*down C.*). And just think, Birdie, it might 'a been me in there with handcuffs on my hands all ready to go to prison.

BIRDIE. Oh, don't, Goldie! If they'd a took you off to prison it would have broke my heart in two.

GOLDIE (*crosses to COCHRAN*). Say, Mr. Inspector, I want to ask you a question.

COCHRAN. All right; go ahead.

GOLDIE. You're an officer of the law, ain't you?

COCHRAN. Something like that.

GOLDIE. Well, then, how much does it cost to get a license? (*Giggles.*) That's what I want to know.

BIRDIE (*close to GOLDIE, at his R.*). Yes, sir; that's what we wants to know. (*Giggles bashfully.*)

COCHRAN. A license? What kind of a license? A dog license?

BIRDIE. No, sir. We ain't no dogs. A wedding license.

COCHRAN. Oh, a wedding license.

GOLDIE. Yes, sir. We're going to buy one of them things and git married with it, just like other folks.

COCHRAN. It'll cost you about two dollars.

GOLDIE. Two dollars? Gee whiz! Kinder expensive, ain't it? Well, dog gone it, Birdie's worth two dollars. I'd git one if it cost as much as two fifty

BIRDIE. That's right. What's two dollars, Goldie?

GOLDIE. Now, don't you git extravagant notions, or I won't git married to you at all. I ain't no millionaire.

BIRDIE. I know a feller that works over at the Court House. He's the second janitor. Maybe he kin git us a license at a reduction. Come on, Goldie. I got to wait on table fer breakfast. We can't stay here all day. (*Takes his arm.*)

GOLDIE. We'll see you later, Inspector.

BIRDIE. Here; you carry this basket.

GOLDIE. That's just the way. I might as well be a married man already. (*They go out L. arm in arm.*)

COCHRAN (*seated at L.*). A pair of young fools, and yet they have found the greatest thing in all the world--love, happiness and a home. (*Muses.*) The greatest thing in all the world.

*Enter KATE from L.*

KATE (*comes down C.*). Mr. Cochran, I want to speak to you.

COCHRAN (*rises*). Yes, Miss Kate, and I want to speak to you. (*Takes off hat and throws cigar in cuspidor.*)

KATE. How is R. F. this morning? The poor old man.

COCHRAN. He's as well as you could expect.

KATE. Isn't there any way out of this for him?

COCHRAN. Nothin' doing. He committed a crime, made a confession, and 'll have to suffer the penalty.

KATE. What is the penalty?

COCHRAN. He'll get about five years.

KATE. Five years in the penitentiary. It is horrible. He is an old man. He'll never live to have his liberty.

COCHRAN. He ought to have thought of that before he robbed the government mail. Say, Miss Kate, will you marry me?

KATE (*astounded*). What?

COCHRAN. I said, will you marry me?

KATE. Marry you? Why, Mr. Cochran, is that a conundrum or a joke?

COCHRAN. It ain't either. It's a serious proposition. I've been in love with you for three years, ever since I first saw you. I don't offer you a boy's love. I bring you the devotion of a lifetime. True love comes only once to a man, Kate, and it has come to me.

KATE. I'm so surprised, Mr. Cochran. I never dreamed anything like this. I never knew you cared for me.

COCHRAN. You've had a pretty hard life, Kate. Every woman does who has to work for her own living. Maybe I could make things easier for you. I make a pretty good salary, and I ain't home much.

KATE. You have done me a great honor, Mr. Cochran. The greatest honor any man can do to a woman. But—(*pauses*).

COCHRAN (*softly*). But—

KATE. I'm afraid—(*pauses*).

COCHRAN. You can't accept my offer? I'm sorry.

KATE. And so am I, for I feel sure that you are a good, honorable man.

COCHRAN. But can't you give me a trial. Don't answer now. Let me come back in a couple of months—

KATE (*sadly*). It wouldn't be any use.

COCHRAN. Is there some one else?

KATE. I—I—

COCHRAN (*controls himself with difficulty*). I see. That's enough. He's a lucky man, Miss Kate. I hope you will be very happy.

KATE. You don't understand. I never intend to marry anyone.

COCHRAN. What?

KATE. No, Mr. Cochran. The man I care for doesn't care for me. So, you see—

COCHRAN. Yes, I see. Isn't there a chance for me, then? You'd better marry a man who loves you than marry a man you love.

KATE. Oh, I can't; I can't. Please, Mr. Cochran.

COCHRAN. All right. But if you ever need a friend. Miss Kate, no matter what happens, no matter what goes wrong, remember that there is one man in the world who believes in you, and who would come from the other end of the earth to help you.

KATE. You are so good.

COCHRAN. Good? Me? Hell, no. I ain't good. I'm just a plum fool; that's all. Just a plum fool.

KATE. You're a true and upright man. This is the proudest moment in my life, Mr. Cochran, when you asked me to become your wife.

COCHRAN. Yes, but you wouldn't do it.

KATE. I couldn't. But I will always look upon you as one of my best and closest friends.

COCHRAN. That's right, Miss Kenyon; that's just what I'm going to be.

KATE. Would it be possible for me to see R. F. for a few minutes?

COCHRAN. Why, of course. He's in there.

KATE. Thank you. (*Starts to door, turns at door. Comes back to COCHRAN at C.*) Mr. Cochran.

COCHRAN. Yes?

KATE. R. F. D. never stole that money. He is innocent.

COCHRAN. What d' y' mean?

KATE. I have the hundred dollars here. (*Shows two fifty dollar bills.*)

COCHRAN. Where did you get it?

KATE. I—I—if the money is paid back to Mrs. Jeffs, wouldn't it be possible to let the whole matter drop?

COCHRAN. Let the matter drop? Impossible.

KATE. But the money would have been paid back. No one would lose anything. Why should it be necessary to send this old man to the penitentiary, to his death, when everybody would be satisfied without?

COCHRAN. That wouldn't be justice.

KATE. It would be mercy. And mercy is higher than justice.

COCHRAN. Where did you get that hundred dollars?

(*Pause.*) Come on. Tell me. Are those the bills that were taken from that envelope? Is this the money that was stolen?

KATE. Mr. Cochran, you just told me that whenever I needed a friend to come to you. I take you at your word. Now is the time. I do need a friend. Oh, I do! Take this money, Mr. Cochran; give it to Mrs. Jeffs and let this poor old man go free.

COCHRAN (*hesitates, then straightens up and speaks decisively*). You don't realize what you are asking. My sworn duty to the government—

KATE (*persistently*). But R. F. D. isn't guilty. He never stole that money.

COCHRAN. He confessed.

KATE. He made that confession to shield some one else.

COCHRAN. How do you know that?

KATE. Because—because—oh, don't you see? Can't you understand?

COCHRAN. My God! Kate Kenyon, did you take that money?

KATE (*looks at him, sinks in chair, bows head and weeps*).

COCHRAN (*astounded*). A thief? You—a thief? Oh, I don't believe it. (*Back to audience.*) I can't believe it. (*Bows head.*)

KATE. You said you loved me.

COCHRAN. And so I do. But there is one thing higher than love, Kate, and that is duty. I've got to do my duty.

KATE (*rises*). Then I am ready. Mr. Cochran, do your duty. (*Pronounced pause. He standing with back to audience, she with her arms held imploringly toward him.*)

COCHRAN (*turns, comes to her*). Miss Kenyon, will you be my wife?

KATE (*surprised*). Your wife?

COCHRAN. You need me now as you never have needed me before. No matter what you have done, in spite of this thing, in spite of all the world, I love you. Let me help you. Will you be my wife?



KATE. You think me a thief and yet you are willing to make me your wife?

COCHRAN. Everyone makes mistakes. I don't love you for what you have done. I love you because you are you. There isn't a man or a woman living who hasn't done things that would have been better left undone. I know you will do right from now on. Let me help you. That's all I want. You need me. Let me help you.

*Enter R. F. D. from R.*

R. F. D. Little Princess, I knowed you'd come; I knowed you'd come.

COCHRAN (*crosses to R.*). Think over what I have said, Miss Kate. And when you want me, I will be ready for you. (*Exit R.*)

KATE (*comforting R. F.*). Oh, R. F., I am so sorry. I am so sorry.

R. F. D. Now, don't you take on, little princess. It's all for the best. The Lord is good. I put my trust in him.

KATE. But why did you confess, R. F.? Why did you take all the burden of this crime upon yourself?

R. F. D. I was tempted and I fell. I wanted the money.

KATE. You never stole that money.

R. F. D. Princess!

KATE. You are assuming the guilt of another. You are willing to go to prison, that the guilty man shall go free. You are giving up your liberty, you are giving up your very life, for some one else.

R. F. D. (*simply*). "What greater love hath a man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend."

KATE. You are doing this for him—for your son—for Steve Audaine.

R. F. D. Yes, little princess; you know my secret. I am doing it for my boy. You recognized the name the same as I did. Ira Troutman. Just to think that Steve is my little boy! But this must be our secret. He must never know. You won't tell him. Promise me that he shall never know that I am his father.

KATE. But why?

R. F. D. I wouldn't want my boy to know his father was a thief. You see, I ain't nothin'; nothin' at all. Jest only old R. F. D. Now, honey, you jest let things go on like they are. I'll go away to prison and my boy'll never know.

*Enter STEVE AUDAINE from L.*

STEVE (*at L.*). R. F.! Kate!

KATE (*at C., startled*). Steve!

STEVE. I want to speak with R. F., Kate. I have something to say to him that must be said at once.

KATE. I understand, laddie, and I honor you for it. I have a plan. All may yet be well. (*Cross to L.*) I'll be back soon. Tell Mr. Cochran that I'll be back soon and give him his answer. (*Exit L.*)

STEVE (*after a pause goes to R. F. D., takes his handcuffed hands.*) Why did you do it?

R. F. D. There, there boy. Now, you go away and let the old man alone. I'd rather not talk about it.

STEVE. I can't go away. Why have you made this sacrifice for me? You know I took that money, and yet you said you were the thief. All through the night one word has rung in my ears. Go where I would, do what I would, I could only hear that one word. "Coward, coward, coward!" (*Breaks down and sobs.*)

R. F. D. (*putting his arms around him*). There, there, lad. Don't take on so. Don't ye. Don't ye.

STEVE. I was hopelessly in debt. I squandered my money. I was a spendthrift and I became a thief.

R. F. D. How it all comes back to me. Sixteen years ago. I know, lad. I know.

STEVE. I've been a weak, foolish boy. Now I'm a man. Do you think I will allow you to go to prison for my crime? Do you think I could stay here with that word "Coward!" ringing always in my ears? I am going in there and see the Inspector. I am going to tell him the truth.

R. F. D. You are not. I am an old man, boy, and I ain't got long to live. You—why, you got your whole life before you. If you went to prison it would ruin you forever. It ain't right. You're young and have all your

life before you. Let me go in your place. Please, lad; please! You stay right here and repay me.

STEVE. How could I ever repay such a sacrifice?

R. F. D. By living straight and noble and upright. Just as I would want my own boy to live. Some time, when you are tempted to do wrong again, jest you think of me out there in the prison, praying for you, loving you and trusting in you.

STEVE. But why are you doing all this for me?

R. F. D. Why? Because (*simply*) I am your father.

STEVE (*kneels at his feet*). My father!

R. F. D. Other men give their boys good advice and money and a good start in life. I ain't got no money to give you, lad, nor no name. I ain't got nothing to give my boy. Only one thing—my liberty. That's what I'll give you, boy. My liberty.

STEVE. No, no. I'll never allow you to go back to prison. I have been blind. Blind to a good woman's love, blind to Kate Kenyon's devotion, blind to your sacrifice. But now I see. (*Rises.*) I see my duty and I'm going to do it.

R. F. D. (*alarmed*). Where are you going?

STEVE. I am going to the Inspector. I am going to prison.

*Enter COCHRAN from R.*

COCHRAN. Morning, Steve.

STEVE (*at L. C.*). Mr. Cochran, there is something I want to say to you. This man (*points to R. F. D.*)—

*Enter KATE from L.*

KATE (*at L.*). Steve, what are you doing?

R. F. D. (*at R. C., to COCHRAN, who is at R.*). Don't listen to him, Inspector. Don't listen to him.

KATE. Mr. Cochran, I have something to say to you at once. I am willing to do anything—to make any sacrifice—

*Enter MRS. JEFFS from L.*

MRS. J. I want to see the man who stole my money.

ALL. Mrs. Jeffs!

MRS. J. (*down L.*). Yes, Mrs. Jeffs. Good morning, Kate.

KATE. Mr. Cochran, I want to speak to Mrs. Jeffs. Please, Mr. Cochran. Let me speak with her. Steve, R. F., don't say anything until I talk with Mrs. Jeffs. Please, Mr. Cochran, for my sake.

COCHRAN. All right, Miss Kate. Come, R. F. (*Exit R.*)

R. F. D. Trust in the Lord, little princess. Everything is bound to come out right if you only trust in Him. (*Exit R.*)

KATE. Steve, wait for me outside.

STEVE. I am determined to do the right thing at last, Kate.

KATE. I knew you would, laddie. I knew you would.

STEVE. I'll wait for you. (*Exit L.*)

KATE (*at C.*). Mrs. Jeffs, do you think R. F. D. stole your money?

MRS. J. I don't want to think so. He's such a nice old man, and he's an old soldier. I don't know what to think.

KATE. If R. F. goes to prison for five years he will never survive his sentence. Think of that old man going to prison. Away from all the world—for five years.

MRS. J. (*cries*). Ain't it awful. And he's such a kind old man, too.

KATE. See, Mrs. Jeffs, here is one hundred dollars.

MRS. J. My money?

KATE. If your money is returned to you, you wouldn't send R. F. to prison, would you? (*Pause.*) Would you?

MRS. J. (*hesitates*). Well, I—

KATE. You wouldn't—you couldn't. See, here is the money. Every cent of it. You wouldn't send an old soldier to prison for life, would you? (*Gives it to her.*) Now, the life of R. F. is in your hands.

MRS. J. What do you want me to do?

KATE. Do what you think is right.

MRS. J. I'm going to do my duty. No one can ever say that Mrs. T. R. Jeffs failed to do her duty. Inspector! Mr. Cochran!

KATE (*alarmed*). No, no, Mrs. Jeffs. Have mercy!

MRS. J. You mind your own business. (*Louder.*) Inspector!

KATE. What are you going to do?

MRS. J. I am going to do what is right. (*Loudly.*) Cochran!

*Enter COCHRAN from R, followed by R. F. D. Enter STEVE AUDAINE from L.*

COCHRAN. Do you want me?

MRS. J. Yes, I do. Say, you got old R. F. D. there arrested for stealing my money, ain't you?

COCHRAN (*down R.*). Yes.

MRS. J. (*at C.*). And do you think he is the thief? Do you think that poor old man took that hundred dollars?

COCHRAN (*looks at KATE, still suspecting her*). I—I don't—know.

MRS. J. (*loudly*). Well he hain't. He never stole my hundred dollars, because it never was stole.

COCHRAN. Never was stolen?

MRS. J. I'm awfully sorry to have caused you all this trouble. I found my hundred dollars this morning in the pocket of my new purple coat. I thought I had mailed it to the real estate company, but I forgot to put it in the letter. Nobody never stole no money at all, because I had it all the time.

COCHRAN (*severely*). Are you speaking the truth?

MRS. J. (*belligerently*). Do you mean to call me a liar to my face? Look here. Here's the very two identical fifty dollar bills. Take them handcuffs off of that old man. Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. And him an old soldier. Now, I can go home and git my breakfast in peace. (*Goes to door at L., meets STEVE.*) Git out of my way. (*Turns at door.*) I guess that's all. I certainly am glad I found that money. (*Exits L.*)

COCHRAN (*removes handcuffs from R. F. D.*). So she never lost her money, after all. (*Shakes hands with R. F. D.*) I'm mighty glad for your sake. This is a case that will never be reported to the Postoffice Department. (*Comes down to KATE, shakes hands with her.*) And I'm

mighty glad for your sake. No matter what has happened, I'll always be your friend. (*Shakes hands with STEVE.*) Boy, you're a lucky devil. (*Changes voice.*) Guess I'll go out and get some breakfast. Good morning. (*Exit L. with hat.*)

R. F. D. And it's all coming out all right, after all. I knowed it would. Boy, we'll resign from the civil service. We'll all go out to Montana and be as happy as bees on my little homestead.

STEVE (*comes to KATE*). My trouble has opened my eyes to the beauty and nobleness of your soul. I am going to redeem myself so that I may be worthy of you—so that I can win back your love.

KATE. My love? Steve, do you really care for my love?

STEVE. Care for it? Kate, I realize what a fool I have been. All these years you have been my beacon light, my guiding star. Will you believe in me and wait for me and come to me when I have proved worthy of you?

KATE. Whenever you want me?

R. F. D. (*at R.*). Why, honey, he wants you now. You come with us, out there in Montana in our little homestead. The sun is shining on a new life, and we'll all be together. Just we three. Me and my boy and my little princess.

STEVE. No, let me show myself an honest man, first.

R. F. D. You ain't a dishonest man, son. You're only a weak boy who gave way to temptation. You need a strong, loving woman for a guide. You need the little princess.

STEVE (*at L.*). I do—I do. Kate, will you be my wife?

KATE (*bashfully*). I—I think so. (*He embraces her at C.*)

R. F. D. (*at R. C.*). God is good, my boy. The new life is waiting for all of us. For me and you and our little princess.

CURTAIN.

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